

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 02-05-2013		2. REPORT TYPE Masters of Military Science Research Paper		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) September 2012 - May 2013	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Wrestling the Hydra: Exploiting Organizational Evolution in Terrorist Groups				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Smith, Landgrave T., Major, USA				5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A	
				5e. TASK NUMBER N/A	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES N/A					
14. ABSTRACT Terrorist groups will inevitably change in response to their environments, namely in response to the internal and external forces generated by geography, leadership, alliances, and adversary actions. Furthermore, the evolving nature of these violent non-state actors is vulnerable to exploitation, and policies that take advantage of this fact can speed such groups to an acceptable end. Changes in a group's operating environment will cause modifications of organizational behavior or structure in order to ensure its survival and continued efficacy. This variation will result in an evolutionary process that will ultimately manifest itself in four distinct trends in organizational change. As a violent non-state actor moves through its life cycle, it will experience a combination of these trends due to the variation of their own structures and practices in response to the world that surrounds them. Three cases from Iraq provide more detailed examinations of these trends. The Mahdi Army, the National Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS Iraq), and al-Qaeda in Iraq offer organizations that experience the full spectrum of this phenomenon. From a perspective of policy, the counter terrorism strategist recognizes organizational evolution in its target as either a series of opportunities to exploit, or vulnerabilities to create.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Organizational Evolution; Terrorist Groups; Rational Choice; Jaish al-Mahdi, JAM; al Qaida in Iraq, AQI; 1920s Revolutionary Bri					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 69	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Marine Corps University/Command and a
a. REPORT Unclass	b. ABSTRACT Unclass	c. THIS PAGE Unclass			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

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Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

WRESTLING THE HYDRA:
EXPLOITING ORGANIZATIONAL EVOLUTION IN TERRORIST GROUPS

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AY 12-13

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Executive Summary

Title: Wrestling the Hydra: Exploiting Organizational Evolution in Terrorist Groups

Author: Major Landgrave T. Smith, United States Army

Thesis: Terrorist groups will inevitably change in response to their environments, namely in response to the internal and external forces generated by geography, leadership, alliances, and adversary actions. Furthermore, the evolving nature of these violent non-state actors is vulnerable to exploitation, and policies that take advantage of this fact can speed such groups to an acceptable end.

Discussion: Changes in a group's operating environment will cause modifications of organizational behavior or structure in order to ensure its survival and continued efficacy. This variation will result in an evolutionary process that will ultimately manifest itself in four distinct trends in organizational change. Faction occurs when an organization splits or suffers from identifiable variance in its ideology or objective. Consolidation is the opposite, occurring when the bonds that hold an organization become tighter, such as during a group's initial formation. In terms of the world surrounding the terrorist group, organizations will either trend towards reconciliation or division. Reconciliation occurs when a group moves closer to the ideological or political mean of its adversary government or population, often resulting in a move towards political participation. Division can also be referred to as the radicalization of a cause and often happens in conjunction with a group's defeat, a loss of relevance, or internal faction. As a violent non-state actor moves through its life cycle, it will experience a combination of these trends due to the variation of their own structures and practices in response to the world that surrounds them. Three cases from Iraq provide more detailed examinations of these trends. The Mahdi Army, the National Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS Iraq), and al-Qaeda in Iraq offer organizations that experience the full spectrum of this phenomenon.

Conclusion: There are multiple reasons for examining organizational evolution in violent non-state actors. These include the author's goal: determining the best possible set of circumstances for bringing about the end of such a group and manipulating its organizational change in such a way as to facilitate those conditions. From a perspective of policy, the counter terrorism strategist recognizes organizational evolution in its target as either a series of opportunities to exploit, or vulnerabilities to create. This realization is as true for complex threat movements such as al Qaeda as it is for the groups included as case studies.

Preface

This project began in 2002 as an independent study conducted to determine the nature of change in non-state actors, specifically terrorist organizations, and how that change affected the group's collective rational choice.¹ While I have referenced the original study, the model itself has been updated based on my own operational experience and observations to more accurately reflect the relationships among variables at play in organizations. These changes add more comprehensive meaning to the model rather than alter its true nature.

In its current form, this model describes organizational change in terrorist groups in terms of the environment within which they operate and four resulting trends in evolution. The internal and environmental factors that contribute to the evolution of an armed group include leadership, geography, adversary actions, and alliances. A combination of environmental stimuli results in an organization's evolution. Organizational evolution can be internal or external in nature, trending towards factionalism or consolidation, reconciliation or division.

The framework discussed here has applicability that extends beyond groups identified as terrorist groups. As case studies, this paper examines three examples of armed militant groups from the Iraq conflict. By any other name, each of these cases is a violent non-state actor. Many of the same trends in organizational evolution described here seem to be evident in the examinations of other violent non- or sub-state actors, both active and dormant.

I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Harmon, the University Horner Chair, for his consistent insight and guidance throughout the development of this study. I would also like to thank Dr. Frank Marlo and Dr. Norman Cigar for providing a critical eye and valuable feedback.

¹ Landgrave Smith, *Life Cycles in Terrorist Groups: Organizational Evolution and its Effect on Collective Rational Choice* (West Point, NY, May 31, 2003).

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“As a second labour he ordered [Hercules] to kill the Lernaean hydra. That creature, bred in the swamp of Lerna, used to go forth into the plain and ravage both the cattle and the country. Now the hydra had a huge body, with nine heads, eight mortal, but the middle one immortal. So mounting a chariot driven by Iolaus, he came to Lerna, and having halted his horses, he discovered the hydra on a hill beside the springs of the Amymone, where was its den. By pelting it with fiery shafts he forced it to come out, and in the act of doing so he seized and held it fast. But the hydra wound itself about one of his feet and clung to him. Nor could he effect anything by smashing its heads with his club, for as fast as one head was smashed there grew up two ... and in his turn [he] called for help on Iolaus who, by setting fire to a piece of the neighboring wood and burning the roots of the heads with the brands, prevented them from sprouting. Having thus got the better of the sprouting heads, he chopped off the immortal head, and buried it...”

- Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*²

An Introduction

Most societies have at some point in their history been forced to develop the tools and capacity to combat ideologically or politically motivated violence. Terrorism is a particularly unpleasant form because much of that violence is directed at civilians. Ultimately a society's response is aimed at ending terrorist groups, and there are five common ways in which this generally occurs. In very broad terms, most groups end either through policing, military force, splintering, politics, or victory.³ The adaptive nature of their networks makes the challenge of implementing effective policies to defeat terrorist groups more difficult. While this characteristic is readily apparent, terrorist groups do not possess preternatural capabilities and not all instances of organizational adaptation are necessarily intentional. Terrorist groups will evolve in response to the internal and external forces defined by geography, leadership, alliances,

² Apollodorus, *Book 2 of the Library*, translated by James G. Frazer. Para. 2.5.2., <http://www.theoi.com/Text/Apollodorus2.html>.

³ Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2008), 10.

and adversary actions generated by their environments. Furthermore, some facets of the evolving nature found in these violent non-state actors is vulnerable to exploitation, and policies that take advantage of this fact can speed such groups to an acceptable end. More specifically, the three case studies examined here indicate policies that achieve isolation, encourage faction, and yet retain the ability to support the potential for reconciliation provide encouraging possibilities in this regard. As a potential starting point for building comprehensive strategies to defeat terrorist groups, an understanding of the environmental pressures on them can offer ways to capitalize on these vulnerabilities.

A Word on Definitions

The phrases terrorist group, rational choice, and the relationship between terrorism and insurgency require clarification.⁴ Borrowing a definition, a terrorist group can be described as “any non-state [actor] opposing government authority through the use of terrorism, a form of violence that does not aim to defeat the government’s military or security forces but to influence popular attitudes.”⁵ This particular definition is meant primarily to distinguish a terrorist group from an insurgency, a distinction that can be dimmed by the frequency with which insurgencies dabble in terrorism. Insurgencies are by definition armed attempts to overthrow a legitimate government or otherwise challenge a ruling power. There is a relationship between terrorism and

⁴ Terrorism, as defined by the Department of Defense is “The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.” (DoD, JP 1-02) The FBI, referring to the Code of Federal Regulations defines it in the same terms, but makes a distinction between international and domestic terrorism for the purposes of law enforcement. (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85) The FBI shapes its definition of terrorism so that it is suitable for discussing terrorism as a law enforcement problem vice a national security problem. While there is some differences among definitions, this is primarily a reflection of the professional jurisdictions represented by each defining agency. A more common source of confusion is the labeling of organizations as terrorist groups as opposed to insurgencies.

⁵ Martha Crenshaw, *Mapping Militant Organizations*, Stanford University: Center for International Security and Cooperation, September 2010, http://iis-db.stanford.edu/res/2779/mapping_terrorist_organizations.pdf.

insurgency, although the two do not necessarily coexist in any given instance. There is a certain degree of risk in automatically tying terrorism to insurgency by way of labeling all violent or non- or sub-state actors as “terrorist groups.” Generally speaking, this is a relatively common method used by governments to marginalize an insurgency. Terrorism, whether referring to the event itself or the threat of violence, is an act; it is a strategic targeting choice that an organization makes. While many insurgencies do turn to terrorism at some point in their struggle, not all terrorist groups have an immediate interest in being an insurgency. On the contrary, most insurgencies have found that unrestrained violence aimed at a population is actually counterproductive to the success of their revolutionary agenda.⁶ The terrorist and insurgency labels used to describe an organization at any given point in its life cycle are not meant to confuse the issue, but rather are used to link the organization with its actions at a particular point in time.

An equally important concept is that of rational choice. Rational choice, as it pertains to terrorist groups, refers to an act of terrorism as a strategic choice rather than an automatic response or an irrational obligation. It is one made in light of the assessment of an organization’s security environment, and connects the organizations means to its desired outcomes. When confronted by a perceived lack of options, a lopsided power ration, and an immovable ideology, terrorism becomes a viable course of action with which to pursue a group’s goals.⁷ Some groups have proven quite capable of pursuing terrorism and ceasing such operations when they have served their purpose. The case of the Zapatistas in Mexico comes to mind as one such example.

⁶ The line between “terrorist” and “insurgent” becomes blurred in the case of either a terrorist group that decides to become an insurgency like the PKK in Turkey, or an insurgency that turns to terrorism in the midst of its campaign. In both of these cases, the argument over their definition as a terrorist group or an insurgency is academic rather than practical.

⁷ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes for Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics*, July 1981. 387.

This group effectively executed a campaign which made limited use of terrorist attacks and then exploited these operations by focusing on a web-based information operations campaign that ultimately proved effective in spurring significant social change in Mexico.⁸ Collective rational choice, an important concept in this paper, refers specifically to an organization's ability to command and, more importantly, control its elements. This can be measured by the adherence or lack thereof to organizational decrees on the part of a group's individual elements.

A Modern Practitioner of Terrorism

As violent non-state actors (VNSAs), contemporary terrorist groups are able to influence the course of world events in a way that was not possible prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001.⁹ This is true for a number of reasons. First, these groups are technologically enabled. Changes in communications technology have breached some of the long standing spatial and temporal obstacles to command and control and have given rise to organizations that can function globally through porous borders.¹⁰ Such groups are sustained by their environments, and thrive in what can be described as security dead-space. These sanctuaries are ungoverned spaces available to non- or sub- state actors for the purposes of their manning, training, and equipping.¹¹ Modern terrorist organization have the ability to build and maintain relationships

⁸ James C. McKinley Jr., "The Zapatistas Return: A Masked Marxist on the Stump," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/06/international/americas/06mexico.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

⁹ John Robb's book, *Brave New War* provides a very concise description of the factors leading to an overall increase in non-state actors' capabilities. In the chapter entitled "The Long Tail of Warfare Emerges," Robb uses an economic metaphor to describe what he sees as three components to this transformation. These are the decentralization of the tools of warfare, unlimited shelf space for technology, and low barriers to movement across porous borders. John Robb, *Brave New War* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 2007). 74-75.

¹⁰ Klejda Mulaj, "Violent Non-State Actors: Exploring Their State Relations, Legitimation, and Operationality," *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics*, ed. Klejda Mulaj, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 2.

¹¹ Mulaj, 13.

with other entities, be they non-state actors, such as other terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), or state actors.¹² These relationships are often mutually beneficial, but all alliances and relationships bring with them consequences.¹³ Thus, the Hydra becomes an apt metaphor for the complex and dangerous nature of modern terrorist groups. Much like the mythical Hydra, the modern group practicing terrorism is a complex animal, resilient, adaptive, and effective.

Another important characteristic of violent non-state actors is the way in which they change over time. In reaction to their surroundings, terrorist groups will evolve over time based on the internal and external forces generated by variables presented in their environments. Four such variables are geography, leadership, alliances and relationships, and government responses. Geography is a limiting factor in so far as proximity and separation will affect the overall command, control, and effectiveness of an organization. The effects of geography on the evolution and structure of a violent non-state actor are relative to not only physical proximity, but also the availability of and confidence in secure communications methods for command and control. An understanding of geography and its effects on an organization should not be limited to physical distances; human terrain and the differences in peoples across distances and boundaries are also important. The branch affiliates of the al-Qaeda network to include al-Qaeda in Iraq have a remarkable degree of latitude in conducting operations, but the geographical separation of these organizations does lead to some compelling limitations on the parent organization's ability to exercise command and control.

The leadership of an organization can be a unifying presence or a destabilizing influence, and sometimes both at different levels of command. Competing interests and priorities within

¹² Mulaj, 6-7.

¹³ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Dynamics of the Armed Struggle* (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), 143-144.

the group, external temptations, an overemphasis on unachievable success, and subordinate weariness all have the possibility to derail the best laid plans of terrorists and insurgents alike. As an example of the latter, LTTE in Sri Lanka experienced a catastrophic schism that was made possible by conflicts between senior leaders. Despite the charismatic nature of Velupillai Prabhakaran's leadership, Colonel Karuna and the majority of the organization's combat power in the Eastern Province split from LTTE and reconciled with the Sri Lankan Government in 2004.¹⁴ The leadership of any armed struggle faces a daunting task; operating outside of the law, the terrorist leader must find a way to drive his organization to success while at the same time ensuring the survival of the organization.

Violent non-state actors enter relationships to gain sanctuary, training or material support, legitimacy, or international recognition. Alliances, as a matter of strategic choice for any non-state actor, carry with them potential consequences. The sanctuary an ally provides can offer the ungoverned space necessary for an organization to effectively plan and prepare in an environment of reduced pressure, allowing it to remain coherent and true to its ideology. An ally can also intentionally or unintentionally subvert a terrorist group's objectives, drawing subordinate elements away from their leadership. Likewise, an external entity can have the effect of altering a group's goals or even its ideology over time. The FARC-EP's involvement with the Colombian drug trade is one example of a group that suffered the dilution of its ideological message through an economically beneficial relationship.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2007). 94-99. Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan is often referred to by his *nomme de guerre*, Colonel Karuna. Colonel Karuna was a member of Prabhakaran's body guard prior to becoming the commander of LTTE forces in the Eastern Province. By 2004 he was regarded as the second most prominent leader in the LTTE, a position that habitually carried with it a certain degree of friction with Prabhakaran. Disagreements first arose between the two when Colonel Karuna believed that the LTTE fighters in the East Province were being marginalized and unsupported.

¹⁵ "War and Drugs in Colombia," *International Crisis Group Latin America Report N°11*, 27 January 2005, 12-13, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.pdf.

Finally, adversaries' responses to terrorism can be varied both in origin and nature. A government response is often the most direct threat to a terrorist group. Equally likely, however, the most immediate threat actually comes in the form of rival organizations. Rival groups of both differing and like ideologies can pose a threat as they vie for limited resources, influences or power. Further complicating the array of threats that a violent non- or sub-state actor potentially faces is the varying degree to which adversaries present themselves. For example, government responses to terrorist organizations range from enacting policies designed to erode a cause's base of support to outright military engagement. In many cases, an adversary's response will demand a change in method or structure for the terrorist group in order to avoid defeat and continue to carry out operations. Such variations may include an increase in security measures or the movement of an organization underground, although this will not always be the case; some organizations exist as underground groups prior to the initiation of hostilities, like Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* which existed for 10 years prior to striking out.¹⁶ Other efforts to harden an organization in response to an adversary can include an overall increase in the complexity of sustainment systems or gradual shifts in the type of members recruited and retained. From the terrorist group's perspective, these changes, left unmitigated, can have unforeseen consequences for the organization and its goals.

A Model in Three Parts

This study of violent non-state actors begins with an evolutionary perspective on group formation and change. This approach to the behavior of terrorist groups accounts for the learning and adaptive nature of their networks. Howard Aldrich, in his book *Organizations Evolving*,

¹⁶ David Scott Palmer, "Terror in the Name of Mao," in *Democracy and Counterterrorism*, edited by Robert J. Art and Louis Richardson (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2000), 198.

provides a lens through which to observe the variables and forces, both internal and external, which affect an organization throughout its life.¹⁷ By translating this concept of evolution to terrorist groups, it is possible to bring new insights to any examination of organizational change in violent non- and sub- state actors. This framework refers to organizational change in very broad terms, retaining the flexibility to incorporate aspects of multiple disciplines. In general graphical terms, this model can be described as existing along three lines. Two perpendicular lines describe both the concept of an ideological or political mean and a spectrum of the population that supports a group's stated ideology and stated objectives at its inception. A third line traces the organization's life cycle, a journey that is described in three parts. The first is group formation, the second rational or strategic choice, and the third is evolution. These three components are not mutually exclusive in temporal terms, and elements of each can be noticeably present at any given time in a terrorist group's life cycle. During the course of any given campaign, for example, organizational restructuring, strategic decision-making and ongoing operations will often occur simultaneously. Like all models, this framework is a facsimile of reality and so is vulnerable to many of the same traps that any model will be. With that understanding in mind, however, a description of its individual elements follows.

At their formation, organizations are by definition goal-directed, boundary maintaining, and socially constructed systems of human activity.”¹⁸ Much like any other organization, violent non- and sub-state actors form because a core group of individuals holds a common interest. Most importantly, the founding members of the organization cannot accomplish their purpose

¹⁷ Howard E. Aldrich, *Organizations Evolving* (London: Sage Publications, 1999). 20-33.

¹⁸ Aldrich, 2.

alone.¹⁹ Group formation has been studied in multiple academic disciplines, all of which seek to describe social movements from a variety of perspectives.²⁰ Looking at the problem from a sociological perspective, Donatella della Porta once examined a terrorist group's formation by describing the connections between the organization, the society, and the individual.²¹ Some scholars have focused on a more psychological explanation for terrorist groups, defining their formation by the members that its cause and its leadership attract.²² Regardless of the perspective from which formation, recruitment, and retention are examined, group formation occurs at the nexus between its organizational purpose, or objective, and its vehicle, or ideology. In the case of terrorist groups, all share a common element in their formation; all such organizations have desired end states, objectives that are articulated through their ideologies.²³

Graphically, the next stage depicted is that of strategic choice. A common misconception holds that terrorists are irrational and bent on indiscriminate violence. On the contrary, organizations can quite rationally choose to pursue a campaign of politically or ideologically motivated violence to achieve their ends. This strategic rational choice for any organization begins with an assessment of the security environment within which it is operating. That assessment is followed by the selection of a course of action that ideally links its ends, ways, and means. In the case of violent non- and sub-state actors, this process must take into account elements of national power, be they diplomatic, military, economic, or informational, as well as

¹⁹ Aldrich, 20-41.

²⁰ Dipak K. Gupta, *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2008). 15.

²¹ Donatella della Porta, "Left Wing Terrorism in Italy," in *Terrorism in Context*, edited by Martha Crenshaw, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995). 107-109.

²² Post, 1-9.

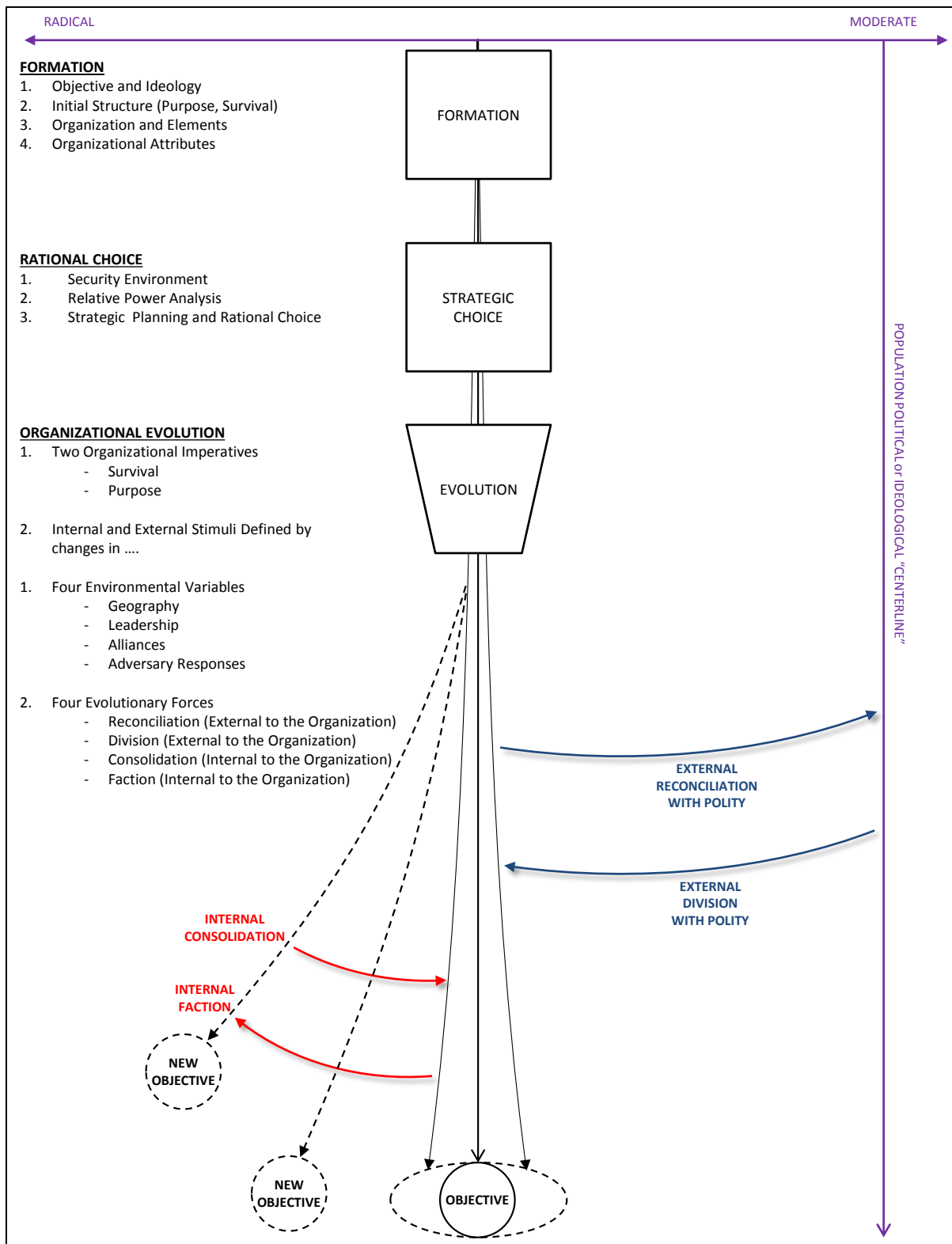
²³ Bell, 35.

environmental and political factors such as the presence of sanctuary, foreign support, infrastructure, and assets. Ultimately, this process culminates in the perception that there is no recourse save an armed struggle, one that based on available means and a desired end state, relies heavily on acts of terrorism.²⁴ Most importantly, this course of action must include an acceptable probability of success in order to remain a viable option for the organization.

The final stage in this framework is evolution, and it encompasses the execution of a group's plan. As previously alluded to, the model depicts strategic choice and evolution occurring in a linear fashion, but this does not necessarily preclude the exercise of rational choice throughout an organization's life cycle. In fact, the question of the original decision is not nearly as thought provoking as the question of continued and effective rational choice through an organization's life cycle. The questions of how and why an organization maintains or loses collective rational choice, and its ability to exercise effective command and control with respect to strategic decisions, are much more compelling inquiries from the counter-terrorist's perspective.

²⁴ Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes for Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, July 1981. 396.

Figure 1 – The Evolutionary Model of Terrorist Group Evolution



Changes in a group's environment will cause evolution in the organization. The necessary satisfaction of two requirements will drive change in any organization. First, every group must be organized and postured to thrive or otherwise successfully accomplish its purpose. Second, the group must be organized in such a manner as to ensure its survival. For the terrorist group operating outside of the legitimate boundaries of law, this means that it must continue to maintain institutional functions such as recruitment, retention, training, operations, and command and control in spite of the environmental pressures that influence it throughout the course of its campaign.

Despite the differences between the economic organizations that Howard Aldrich was originally studying and the terrorist groups examined here, the general concept of variation, or the alteration of practices, competencies, objectives, or forms in an organization is relatively universal.²⁵ Aldrich describes the four processes of organizational evolution as variation, selection, retention, and struggle. The adjustment of traits and behaviors, called variation, is influenced by the concepts of selection, retention and struggle. Selection can be internally or externally driven, but represents the forces at work to change an organization's routine or competencies.²⁶ Retention is the organizational response to selected variation, and the mechanism by which the group preserves a specific variation.²⁷ Struggle refers to the pressures within a group as well as outside that come from the competition for scarce resources.²⁸ The

²⁵ Aldrich, 22.

²⁶ Aldrich, 26.

²⁷ Aldrich, 30.

²⁸ Aldrich, 32.

same process of organizational evolution can be applied to violent non-state actors. The three selected case studies from the Iraq conflict are good illustrations of this point.

For a terrorist group, leadership, geography, alliances, and adversary responses are four environmental variables that will cause the selection and retention of traits and behaviors. The organizational traits in question may be minor adjustments to the group's environment, but such changes have potentially unforeseen second- and third- order effects. The resulting variation is manifested in four common trends, or patterns of organizational change. Returning to the graphical representation of the model, the first pair of common patterns occurs in the conceptual space between an organization's ideology and the ideological or political centerline of the population within which it operates. Organizations, due to internal and external forces will either trend towards division, moving away from the population towards extremism, or towards reconciliation, moving toward the population and its legitimate political processes.

The trend towards division refers to the tendency of a violent non-state actor to diverge ideologically or politically from the population and government it is opposed to. This phenomenon can be more simply described as the gradual radicalization of an armed struggle. The chain of events that starts with the initiation of a violent campaign, followed by the cumulative effects of revenge violence, and ultimately ending with significant changes in recruitment and retention provide an excellent example of the trend towards division. This particular hypothetical sequence also illustrates the complexity of second- and third- order effects on a group and its cause as it evolves to function in its environment. Radicalization can have dire effects on a group as it can cause an inconsistency between the organization's declared ideology and ends on one hand, and its methods on the other. This disparity can in turn result in a loss of support and relevance over time. Al-Qaeda in Iraq faced just such a challenge in Iraq

when it began attacking Iraqi civilians and was confronted by not only Shi'a militias, but also by members of the Sunni insurgency it was trying to consolidate.²⁹ The Red Army Faction, active in Germany from 1968 through the 1980s, offer a historical case study in division and radicalization, as demonstrated by its distinct ideological divergence over time.³⁰ Division is the more difficult of the two external trends to measure, there being no tangible or quantifiable scale for extremism. Instances of reciprocal violence, open refusals to take part in offered negotiations, and shifts to more demanding and less tangible objectives are likely indicators of this trend.

Reconciliation is the propensity for an organization to close the conceptual gap between its own ideology and that of its opposing polity. This trend holds importance because it can occur in combination with the internal trends of consolidation and faction, which can fundamentally alter the course of a violent non-state actor's campaign. For example, amidst attempts to consolidate the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, AQI attacked the leaders of HAMAS Iraq and its armed wing, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades between 2006 and 2007. These attacks resulted in the loss of several key leaders in the latter organization and sparked a serious disagreement within Hamas Iraq. The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades, under this continued pressure from AQI, broke ties with Hamas Iraq, joined the Anbar Salvation Council, and began actively cooperating with Coalition Forces in the Diyala Province.³¹ Another excellent example of this reconciliatory process was seen in the Irish Republican Army's movement toward legitimate political discourse following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the 22 May Referendum that followed.³² It can

²⁹ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008). 173-174.

³⁰ Post, 129-132.

³¹ Bill Roggio, "The Sunni Civil War," *The Long War Journal*, March 27, 2007, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/03/the_sunni_civil_war.php.

³² Wilkinson, 33.

be measured by an organization's communications with the government or even outright participation in legitimate processes like peace talks and negotiations.

A second set of common patterns occurs within an organization. Inside of the group, changes in the environment will drive a group toward faction or consolidation. Faction is the tendency of an organization to split into multiple parts. In some cases, this can be due to ideological differences or disagreements among a group's leadership. Faction can be measured by the observation of disobedience or discord by subordinate elements, a shift towards more extreme and generally less tangible objectives by some portion of the group, or even sudden changes in methods. Faction in an organization can occur both toward the greater polity and away from it, depending on circumstance. One of the most damaging results of faction is the loss of collective rational choice, or a group's gradual loss of ability to effectively command and control its elements with respect to violence. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) split with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and eventually the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), providing a classic example of faction in a terrorist group.³³ History is rife with other examples of schism in these organizations, including the cases of left-wing terrorism in Italy and³⁴ the 2004 divide in the LTTE.³⁵ The latter case, already mentioned, is of interest because of the likelihood of an active role being played by the Sri Lankan government in the encouragement of

³³ "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front," *Mapping Militant Groups*, Stanford University 2010-2013, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/309>.

³⁴ della Porta, 120-122. Another specific description of the factions in left-wing terrorism in Italy are also recorded in Martha Crenshaw's University of Stanford *Mapping Militant Organizations* project, found at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/maps/view/italy>.

³⁵ Andrew Hosken, "I Realized We Would Never Win," *BBC News*, May 5, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8033000/8033150.stm.

Colonel Karuna's defection.³⁶ The Mahdi Army ultimately exhibited several major breaks in its organization, due in large part to the combination of foreign influence on its subordinate elements and a gradual move towards political participation. Faction is an important characteristic in the study of violent non-state actors; while it is not universal, most terrorist groups suffer faction at some point in their life cycle, and it is difficult to find one that fractures in a position of strength.

Consolidation is a group's tendency to become more tightly bound or focused. This trend can be due to a number of factors in addition to the environmental variables already mentioned. Group formation itself is a consolidating event, and a group inherits at its inception certain consolidating factors based on ideology and the makeup of its membership. Unchanging factors like religion or ethnicity will also act as forces of consolidation in an organization, with ethnicity generally being the stronger of the two. Moves towards consolidation cover a broad range of methods, including the formation of umbrella groups like the MSC and ISI in Iraq under al-Qaeda, or techniques of a much darker character, like the Colombian FARC-EP's purges executed by *ayudantías* (advisors) that prevented potential factions.³⁷ In considering

³⁶ "WikiLeaks: Ranil Had No Clue How Karuna Came To Colombo," *The Colombo Telegraph*, August 23, 2012, <http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/wikileaks-ranil-had-no-clue-how-karuna-came-to-colombo/>. It is highly likely that a former parliament member from Batticaloa named Seyed Ali Zahir Moulana acted as the intermediary between the Sri Lankan government and Colonel Karuna. Assuming these efforts to be true, they represent a remarkable example of track-two diplomacy aimed at a subordinate command. Moulana, though he had lost the election to retain his seat in 2001, continued his efforts throughout the ceasefire to improve the supply of humanitarian aid to his home province. It was during this time that he began interacting with Colonel Karuna on a more regular basis. A long standing relationship between the families of the two men facilitated this interaction. When paired with Colonel Karuna's dissatisfaction with Prabhakaran's management of his fighters in the Eastern Province, his harsh totalitarian system of governance in the LTTE controlled territories, and his intended abrogation of the cease fire agreement, the voice of an old family friend urging reconciliation and the pursuance of a political solution would make for a compelling argument. Moulana's role in his defection is made more plausible by the concern expressed by the Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe for the safety of Moulana and his family following Karuna's movement to Colombo.

³⁷ Paul E. Saskiewicz, *The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP): Marxist-Leninist Insurgency or Criminal Enterprise?* (Monterey: Naval Post Graduate School, 2005), 37.

consolidation, the method a group chooses is less important than the intent to gain or maintain solidarity and exert effective control over subordinates. Consolidation is a little harder to measure than faction, but it can be estimated through metrics like an organization's end strength, treaties and alliances that effectively create a new entity by combining ideologically similar organizations, or even the observation of unifying discourse within the organization itself.

A final comment on this evolutionary framework of organizational change should address what is not mentioned. Time and relative size are two noticeably absent factors in the prior discussions of why and how terror groups change. While arguably no terrorist group achieved strategic success without a campaign of several years, it is equally true that enduring a campaign over a long period of time is no guarantee of either certain survival or certain success. Revolutionary Organization 17 November endured a protracted campaign for well over 25 years and yet was eradicated with no lasting successes. Likewise, the Basque separatists of the ETA have struggled since 1959 and at best can claim limited gains – a role in semi-autonomy for the Basques, achieved in the 1970s.³⁸ Also absent is the factor of an organization's size. The Kurdish PKK boasted well over 10,000 uniformed fighters at one point, but was nonetheless stopped for five years between 1999 and 2004 and forced to rebuild following the employment of over 250,000 Turkish troops and security forces.³⁹ The *Zapatistas* sit on the other end of the spectrum, a relatively small group that was able to achieve some success in achieving their goals through the limited use of terrorism.⁴⁰ While a change in a terrorist group's size may be one

³⁸ Christopher C. Harmon, "How Terrorist Groups End," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Fall 2010, 75.

³⁹ Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey and the PKK A Pyrrhic Victory?" in *Democracy and Counterterrorism*, edited by Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2007). 350-359.

⁴⁰ Donald E. Schulz and Stephen J. Wager, *The Awakening: The Zapatista Revolt and its Implications for Civil-military Relations and the Future of Mexico* (Strategic Studies Institute, 1994).

metric that adds to an assessment of success or failure, the absolute size of an organization remains largely irrelevant.

A Few Conclusions

While faced with the specter of transnational violent non-state actors capable of operating with impunity through porous borders, the news for the modern counterterrorist is not all bad. The path to victory is not an easy one for the violent non-state actor; it is just as difficult, if not more so, for the terrorist or insurgent than it is for his or her adversary. In order to successfully navigate this path, the leadership of an organization must not only continue to satisfy the vital requirements of their fighting organization, including manning, training and equipping, but must also contend with their environment. To achieve success in the midst of their environment, a group must successfully manage its evolution in such a way that it arrives at an acceptable end state with a minimal amount of ideological deviation and a relatively focused organization that is responsive to its leadership. Victory however, is but one way in which terrorist groups end. Effective policing, decisive military action, fragmentation, or political participation comprise a far more common collection of potential endings.⁴¹ In building a counter terrorism strategy, there are essentially four of these endings that are palatable, discarding victory as an unacceptable end state. Ultimately, the goal of the counterterrorist should be to force a terrorist group into an end acceptable to good government. The dynamics of the group should be an important part of the counterterrorism conversation due to the constantly changing nature of the threat. Variation occurs to a greater or lesser extent in violent non-state actors based on the variables of geography, leadership, adversary responses, and alliances. Internally driven

⁴¹ Jones and Libicki, 10.

instances of evolution can be opportunities that require exploitation. Meanwhile, external stimuli applied to the group either by itself or in conjunction with such an opportunity, can generate a desired outcome that weakens the terrorist group. This variation, whether actively pursued or merely observed, provides opportunities that can be exploited.

One way to begin framing a strategy for countering a terrorist group is to seek an understanding of the environment that it is operating in with the end goal of manipulating the organization's evolution. In the three cases from Iraq examined below, it is evident that certain variations and their resulting organizational trends are more advantageous to the counterterrorism strategist than others. In general terms, the most advantageous outcomes of variation lead to faction and reconciliation. This combination allows for the incorporation of those elements capable of retaining collective rational choice into legitimate political processes, while ensuring that there is a suitable amount of division in the organization to allow this reconciliation to occur. Division from the government combined with faction within an organization is a close second, with the results most likely leading to a loss of relevance over time. Thus, a look at this evolutionary process in terrorist groups would suggest that ideal policies seek to create or exploit vulnerabilities in an organization derived from the relationship among three of the four trends: faction, reconciliation, and division. The desired outcomes of these policies include the encouragement of faction and the corresponding loss of rational choice within the organization, supporting reconciliation where practical, and the isolation of the group and its factions to allow for their destruction. The methods for implementing such policies can span the spectrum of national power, to include military force and diplomacy in all of its forms. The presence or absence of isolation is a common thread that runs through each of these

evolutionary trends. Efforts to isolate a terrorist group are a necessary consideration because of this.

Isolation increases the pressure on an organization by reducing its overall capability to continue a campaign, forcing potentially controversial decisions inside of the group, and restricting effective command and control. Achieving isolation can be described in terms of several objectives. The first objective is separation of the terrorist group from any sustaining network, to include state or non-state safe havens, transnational criminal organizations, and the links to other terrorist groups. The second equally important facet of isolation has to do with the separation of an organization's factions from one another. Some of this work can be done through physical means. For example, the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) did an excellent job of interdicting Tamil Tiger sea lines of communication that had sustained its ability to fight a conventional campaign.⁴² There is also however, a significant place for diplomacy in isolation. Public diplomacy, track-two and multilateral diplomacy may be combined to effect the isolation of the group.

Faction occurs to some degree in all organizations. It occurs when the collective understanding of ends and methods is either not complete or is contested. It is often caused by the effects of alliances and relationships or sudden changes in policy that originate from a group's senior leadership. Both cases offer the possibility of dissension, misunderstanding, and disobedience within the organization. Generally, faction results in change to either objectives (ends) or methods (ways). This can result in dissonance between ends and means which will

⁴² Thomas A. Marks, "Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," in *Democracy and Counterterrorism*, edited by Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2007). 509.

ultimately impact a group's ability to recruit, its relevance, and its alliances. It also has a negative impact on the group's overall relevance.

In terms of reconciliation, liberal democracies possess one distinct advantage in countering violent non-state terrorist organizations, namely, history. Historically, terrorism as a method alone has proved remarkably ineffective in achieving lasting success in liberal democracies. That is not to say that terrorism does not have an effect, but rather that those effects are not necessarily in line with the organization's initial intent. One reason that liberal democracies can effectively counter terrorism is in the nature of the conflict. In such a government system, it is not necessarily the dissenting opinion in and of itself that is in question but rather the way in which that opinion is expressed and furthered. The institution provides legitimate capability to change policy and so retains the ability to reconcile with moderate elements of the violent non- or sub-state actor.

Division occurs between an organization and its adversary when the group's goals and objectives are unreachable, unrealistic, and there is no room for a negotiated settlement. Either created or exploited, this trend can drive a terrorist group to one or both of the two greatest pitfalls of their kind, an inconsistency between ends and methods and a loss of collective rational choice. This approach takes advantage of organizational tendencies toward division and faction. This goal is pursued through the application of the instruments of national power to manipulate the group's environment in order to erode its moderate base and deny its freedom of action.

A Look Forward

Inevitably, the discussion returns to the mythical Hydra; the question of al-Qaeda still looms. Al-Qaeda's immortal head is an idea and the conflict with the organization at the strategic

level is a contest of ideologies.⁴³ This is not the first time the world has seen an ideology like this one, and such ideas can be defeated over time. Communism is one example of an ideology that rose and eventually fell, but did not do so on its own. Over time, the system itself proved to be an ineffective method of governance, but the time required to achieve that realization was gained through a policy of containment.⁴⁴

Al-Qaeda faces every difficulty expected in establishing a transnational insurgency, linked by a common ideology, but carried out by very different peoples. Despite these challenges, al Qaeda has succeeded in establishing and fostering a network of terrorist groups and insurgencies around the globe. While these groups are ideally grounded in the same ideology, the extent of this consistency has and will continue to be tested. Al-Qaeda and its franchises fall far short of presenting a monolithic front. In fact, if this look at organizational evolution indicates anything, it is that the probability of ideological variance or dilution increases over time and distance. Therefore there is value in maintaining pressure on the regional enterprises of al-Qaeda's transnational insurgency. Such pressure damages an organization's ability to effectively consolidate such disparate conflicts under a homogenous ideology. Forcing such failures create vulnerable fissures in such an organization and its lofty goals. Thus, at the operational level, the fight against al-Qaeda and its franchised insurgencies is a necessary one to support the strategic goal of defeating its ideology. Strategic success here depends on the exploitation of faction within the global Al-Qaeda movement, ultimately revealing the unsustainable nature of its ideology as a viable system of governance.

⁴³ Patrick Sookhdeo, "Ideas Matter," *Toward a Grand Strategy Against Terrorism*, eds. Christopher C. Harmon, Andrew N. Pratt and Sebastian Gorka, (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 229.

⁴⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 764-772. This includes a concise discussion of the reasons for the fall of the Soviet Union, to include U.S. actions. Kissinger makes it a point to discuss economic and military actions, but also the ideological vehicle found in basic human rights.

Currently, in sub-Saharan Africa, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is currently engaged in a struggle with French, Malian, and Western African forces. Having withdrawn to the Valley of Ametetai, the group continues to compete for power with its former Tuareg allies while attempting to draw the French into a protracted conflict in Mali.⁴⁵ From the perspective of the group's evolution over time, the case of AQIM presents similar possibilities for analysis. Within the group, evolutionary milestones include the its origins in the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the split in the organization leading to the creation of the Group Salafist pour la Predication et le Combat (GSPC), the group's affiliation with Central al-Qaeda, and ultimately the separation of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) from the organization. Looking at AQIM's interactions with other groups, the organization has been very active, potentially making efforts to network with regional non-state actors, including the Tuareg National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Ansar al-Dine, al-Shabaab, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).⁴⁶ The MNLA was at one point an ally in AQIM's conquest of northern Mali and now a force apparently ready and willing to join the fight alongside the French and Malian forces.⁴⁷ The future of this conflict is still uncertain. The French plan on withdrawing the majority of their combat power in the coming months, a move that could lead to a new phase in AQIM's fight in northern Mali.

⁴⁵ Thomas Fessey, "French Fight in Mali's Hostile Desert," *BBC*, March 25, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21919769>.

⁴⁶ Jonathon Masters, "al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Backgrounder*, Council on Foreign Relations, January 14 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/north-africa/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>.

⁴⁷ Afua Hirsch and Kim Willsher, "France Has Opened the Gates of Hell, Say Rebels," *The Guardian*, January 14, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/14/mali-conflict-france-gates-hell>.

A Note on the Case Studies

The three case studies presented are linked by the conflict in Iraq that began with the U.S. invasion of the country in 2003 and in some respects continues to this day. These three case studies cover the full spectrum of armed militant groups, from the terrorist organization that transitions to insurgency, to the incipient insurgency that dabbles in terrorism. Due to context, each case can be considered part of a larger insurgency in Iraq. Each case also fits into a definition of a terrorist organization: they all pursued at varying times strategy of terrorism in order to achieve their goals.

Throughout its operations in Iraq, Al Qaeda in Iraq would become defined by the friction between two competing priorities in its ideology, the near enemy and the far enemy. It also suffered from the friction caused by the decidedly sectarian nature of the Iraqi interpretation of al-Qaeda's global jihad. Al Qaeda in Iraq, exhibiting a disregard for the cultural landscape of Iraq under the leadership of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, alienated the majority of the Sunni population it was attempting to win over, and at the same time displayed a trend of faction between itself and Central Al Qaeda. While these trends in organizational change were effectively exploited in the short term, it remains to be seen if these gains can be translated into a lasting end to Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The Mahdi Army was plagued by the competing interests of consolidating political power in the face of rival Shi'a militias and defeating what it saw as an American army of occupation.⁴⁸ Ultimately, the inability of the Mahdi Army's leadership and the Office of Muqtada al Sadr to

⁴⁸ Elie Abouaoun, *Iraq's al-Sadr Movement*, United States Institute of Peace, June 2, 2011, <http://www.usip.org/publications/iraqs-al-sadr-movement>.

effectively manage the transition to political participation in the face of unmitigated alliances with Iranian elements led to the irreversible trend of faction in the organization.

The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades was the armed wing of the National Islamic Resistance in Iraq. This group would later become HAMAS Iraq, an organization supportive of a Sunni rejectionist ideology, though generally eschewing terrorism but for a few exceptions. HAMAS Iraq split roughly down the middle in its disagreements over the way ahead when confronting al-Qaeda's increasingly extremist stance in Iraq.⁴⁹ The 1920s Revolutionary Brigade would go on to not only take part in the violent opposition to al-Qaeda in Iraq, but would also begin to cooperate with Coalition Forces and the Iraqi Government during what would later be called the Awakening.⁵⁰ Taken together, these case studies serve as examples of not only the groups' failures to manage their own organizational evolution, but also in some cases the failures on the part of the Iraqi government and Coalition forces to fully capitalize on the vulnerabilities created by these changes.

⁴⁹ Martha Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, February 12 2010, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/57>.

⁵⁰ Lionel Beehner, "al-Qaeda in Iraq: Resurging or Splintering," *Backgrounder* (Council on Foreign Relations) July 16, 2007, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/al-qaeda-iraq-resurging-splintering/p13007>.

Appendix 1

The Mahdi Army: Faction and Reconciliation

The Mahdi Army, or Jaish al-Mahdi, is a Shi'a Islamist organization that is not only violently opposed to the foreign occupation of Iraq, but is also intensely wary of any Baghdad government. Its life cycle in Iraq would ultimately last eight years with its apogee being 2006-2007. During this time, the group boasted a membership of approximately 60,000 personnel and was regarded as the most powerful force in Iraq, second only to the U.S. military.⁵¹ The Mahdi Army is a group that exhibited a trend of reconciliation, but is ultimately consumed by faction. The driving reasons were mounting adversary actions and military pressure applied by coalition and Iraqi forces, rival Shi'a groups, and a lengthy secular conflict. This pressure was largely unmitigated by its leadership and exacerbated by a foreign power throughout the course of its lifecycle, which continues today. The visible signs of this evolutionary process can be seen in the changing presentation of goals and ideology, particularly in the small groups that separated from the Mahdi Army beginning in 2004.

Between 1992 and 1997, the Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr was the focal point for Shi'a religious thought and scholarship in Iraq. The densely populated Shi'a slum of 2.5 million, with its narrow and confining alleyways, was renamed Sadr City not for the man who would gain headlines following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, but for his father.⁵² Likewise, the Mahdi Army, or Jaish al-Mahdi, is his legacy as much as it is that of his son, Muqtada al-Sadr. The

⁵¹ "Mahdi Army," *New York Times Online*, updated January 18 2011, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/m/mahdi_army/index.html.

⁵² Nimrod Raphaeli, "Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr," *Middle East Quarterly*, Volume XI: Number 4, Fall 2004. 33-42, <http://www.meforum.org/655/understanding-muqtada-al-sadr>.

Ayatollah had a complex relationship with Saddam Hussein in the mid-1990s. He maintained a distinct anti-Baath party rhetoric through much of the 1990s, and despite Saddam Hussein's paranoia of his enemies in Iraq's Shi'a community, this was allowed to continue until 1999. In that year, the Ayatollah was assassinated along with two of Muqtada al-Sadr's brothers. Between 1999 and 2003, the Iraqi *mukhabarat* (secret police) would continue to track Muqtada's al-Sadr's whereabouts while elsewhere, remaining followers of the deceased Ayatollah were killed sporadically throughout the country.⁵³ This ended with the U.S. invasion in 2003.

These events set the stage for the emergence of the Mahdi Army in July of 2003, almost immediately following the U.S. invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Like many other terrorist groups, the Mahdi Army was born of conflict within a larger movement. Two leaders laid claim to the stewardship of Iraq's Shi'a population. The followers of Muqtada al-Sadr separated themselves from those of Sheik Muhammed al-Ya-quibi, a Shi'a Twelver cleric who would go on to establish the Fadila Party in Iraq.⁵⁴ Muqtada al-Sadr immediately adopted his father's anti-American and anti-Israeli stance in an attempt to capitalize on his father's religious and political legitimacy. In effect, this gave the Sadrist movement two faces, the one borne by Muqtada al-Sadr, and the one by Muhammed al-Ya-quibi, leading the Fadila Party. These two rival groups have at different times supported and struggled against one another both politically and violently.⁵⁵

⁵³ Raphaeli, 33-42.

⁵⁴ Eric Herring, "Armed Groups and Fragmentation and Globalization in Iraq," *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics*, edited by Klejda Mulaj (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). 194.

⁵⁵ Herring, 198.

A critical element to the organization's formation was the support provided to Muqtada al-Sadr from external players. The Mahdi Army began with 500 seminary students and followers of Muqtada al-Sadr in the spring of 2003. This beginning is somewhat reminiscent of the Taliban. An initial recruiting effort yielded approximately 300 members from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁶ The primary supporter of the enterprise was the Lebanese Hezbollah and, by extension, the Iranian Qods Force. One key personality during this period was Imad Mugniyah, a Hezbollah leader with the connections and capability to man, train and equip such an organization. In the organization's early days, militiamen were routinely sent to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley for training with the support of Hezbollah.⁵⁷

While its initial support came from outside of Iraq, the Mahdi Army rapidly gained an ability to sustain itself by becoming involved in organized crime. Racketeering, extortion, kidnapping, and automobile theft were among the group's sources of income.⁵⁸ As campaigns against Coalition Forces, the Iraqi Security Forces, Al Qaeda in Iraq, and rival Shi'a groups wore on, these would become more prominent aspects of the organization's sustainment. These methods would later prove detrimental to the organization's relevance as they increasingly drove a wedge between JAM's ends and means.

In the disorder that followed the U.S. invasion in 2003, the Mahdi Army had several functions, including the provision of services to the Shi'a population. Most Shi'as lived in urban

⁵⁶ Bill Roggio, "Mugniyah Behind Establishment of Mahdi Army," *The Long War Journal*, February 23, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/02/mugniyah_behind_esta.php.

⁵⁷ Bill Roggio, "Mugniyah Behind Establishment of Mahdi Army," *The Long War Journal*, February 23, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/02/mugniyah_behind_esta.php.

⁵⁸ Martha Crenshaw, "The Mahdi Army," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, updated February 12, 2010, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/57>.

areas, and cities such as Sadr City, Najaf, Karbala, Basra and Nasiriyah would become focal points for the organization. At the same time, the organization took great pains to insert its members into the Iraqi infrastructure and security forces.⁵⁹ Structurally, this gave rise to a relatively well-ordered hierarchical structure for the group's brigades, and another for local shadow governments that provided protection as well as support for the organization through its illicit activities.⁶⁰

Muqtada began to consolidate his power and influence among Shi'as as early as 2003. There were several obstacles to al-Sadr's goal of becoming the sole voice of Shi'as in Iraq and the face of a new government. One such difficulty was the *Hawza*, the seminary of traditional Islamic higher learning, deeply rooted in politics, and primarily used by Shi'a Muslims. Of extreme importance to Muqtada al-Sadr were the *Hawza's* economic and political roles in Iraq. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the head of the *Hawza 'Ilmiyya Najaf*, not only had strong ties to Iran, having been born there, but also was responsible for the allocation of religious contributions across Iraq. His alleged role in the assassinations of Hojjat ul-Islam Abdul Majid al-Khoei and Hayder ar-Rifa'i represent his early attempts to not only consolidate power, but also silence the voices in the *Hawza* that acted as a moderate voice in the face of al-Sadr's violent rhetoric. They also represented a political and economic challenge to Muqtada al-Sadr's power.⁶¹

Continuing to gain momentum, the organization maintained a relatively low profile until April of 2004. Muqtada al-Sadr made a strategic calculation that included as variables the unviability of the Iraqi government in its fledgling state, the capabilities of coalition forces, and

⁵⁹ "What is Iraq's Mehdi Army?" *BBC News*, March 25, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7312599.stm.

⁶⁰ Herring, 196.

⁶¹ Raphaeli, 33-42.

the influence his Mahdi Army had across the urban areas and institutions of Iraq. Muqtada delivered a fiery sermon on Friday, 2 April 2004, which was answered by heated protests the following day and a wave of attacks across the country. Mahdi Army Fighters initiated attacks across Iraq in the cities of Najaf, Kufa, Kut, Sadr City, Karbala, Nasiriyah, Amarah and Basra.⁶² Initially, the group met with some success against coalition partners and the Iraqi Police, seizing the towns of Najaf, Kufa, Kut. These gains were erased by June of 2004 with a strong coalition counterattack in the early part of May that followed the breakdown of negotiations between Muqtada al-Sadr and the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Though the 2004 uprising was a military defeat for the organization, it gained Muqtada al-Sadr enough credibility to begin preparations for political participation in the 2005 elections. While defeated militarily, his decision to change methods was largely due to the intervention of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani who not only defused the siege of Shrine of Imam Ali, but also urged Muqtada to consider a policy of conditional cooperation with the United States.⁶³

Already, there were indications that the Mahdi Army was not as unified as it appeared. There were several contributing factors that led to Muqtada's growing inability to control his subordinate elements. First, the August 2004 ceasefire in Najaf may have signaled the end to violence sanctioned by Moqtada al-Sadr, but rising trends in sectarian violence across Iraq encouraged the continuation of fighting by rogue Jaish al-Mahdi elements, which would later be dubbed the "Noble Mahdi Army" or "Special Groups."⁶⁴ Second, the movement toward political

⁶² "Mahdi Army," *New York Times Online*, updated January 18 2011, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/m/mahdi_army/index.html.

⁶³ Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada* (New York: Scribner, 2008). 159-161.

⁶⁴ Edward Wong, et al., "Shiite Cleric Wields Violence and Popularity to Increase Power in Iraq," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2005, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C01E1D71731F934A15752C1A9639C8B63&pagewanted=2>.

participation itself began the slow process of alienating some of the more aggressive Sadrist elements, who thought that the only proper way to resist American occupation was through armed struggle.⁶⁵ Third, external influence began to take its toll on the collective rational choice of the organization; Iranian infiltration of the Mahdi Army's fighting formations first through the provision of financial support and second through training and material support began to bypass the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr.⁶⁶ The faction within the Mahdi Army gave rise to a number of splinter groups, including the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH, or League of Righteousness) and the Kataib Hezbollah. Many of these splinter groups received and still receive training, funding, equipment, and in some cases direction from the Iranian Quds Force.⁶⁷

The internal faction that drove the split with Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq is perhaps the most telling example of organizational evolution in the Mahdi Army case. Also commonly referred to as the Khazali Network, this splinter group was founded by Qais al-Khazali sometime in 2004.⁶⁸ The effects of military defeat, a Mahdi Army forced to move underground in order to survive, an attempt by the organization's senior leadership to transition to political processes allowed two major influences to drive a wedge between the small groups that would become AAH and the JAM. Small unit JAM leaders were given more autonomy by necessity, and turned to a sympathetic external ally. In a relationship solidified in 2006, Qais al-Khazali relied on Ali Mussa Daqduq of the Lebanese Hezbollah to continue training and supporting his units that

⁶⁵ Cockburn, 170.

⁶⁶ Cockburn, 168-169.

⁶⁷ Marisa Cochrane, "Special Groups Regenerate," *Iraq Report 11*, Institute for the Study of War, 2, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/special-groups-regenerate>.

⁶⁸ Sam Wyer, "The Resurgence of AAH," Middle East Security Report #7 (Institute for the Study of War), December 2012, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ResurgenceofAAH.pdf>. 12.

desired a continuation of violent means. The importance of this cannot be overstated, as Ali reported to Hezbollah's Director of Special Operations, Youssef Hashim, who in turn reported to Abdul Reza Shahli, (AKA Hajji Yusef), the Director of External Operations for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Quds Force. Carried forward to 2013, the outward signs of faction are obvious in the shifting of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq's goals away from those of the Mahdi Army. The organization's current objectives are more consistent with Iranian interests and the mid-level leadership that believed in a continuation of the violent campaign begun in 2004.⁶⁹

In addition to national elections, 2005 held several changes in store for the Mahdi Army. In the 2005 elections, many of Muqtada's supporters ran on the tickets of two parties, the National Independent Cadres and Elites Party, and the Unified Iraqi Alliance. The Unified Iraqi Alliance, in one instance of cooperation between the two sides of the Sadrist movement, consisted of both Fadila and Sadrist candidates.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, sectarian violence steadily increased throughout Iraq, reaching an apex with the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra.⁷¹

Coalition forces embarked on what would be famously called "the surge" beginning in 2006. In February of 2007, Iraqi Security Forces in conjunction with their coalition partners executed Operation FARDH AL-QANOON (Enforcing the Law). One unique aspect of this operation was the removal of Prime Minister Maliki's protection of Sadrists, leaving Sadrist

⁶⁹ Wyer, 6.

⁷⁰ Herring, 195.

⁷¹ Marisa Cochrane, "The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement," *Iraq Report 12*, Institute for the Study of War, January 2009, <http://www.understandingwar.org/jaysh-al-mahdi>.

neighborhoods open to coalition operations.⁷² Beset by a strong coalition response, and facing increasing pressure from rival Shi'a organizations like the Badr Corps, it became increasingly difficult for the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr to maintain control of its formation. Following heavy fighting in Karbala on 27 August, 2007 between JAM fighters and the Badr Corps Moqtada al-Sadr made a statement that called for not only a cease fire in the JAM-Badr Corps conflict, but also an end to attacks on coalition forces in Iraq.⁷³ These decrees were met with a set of mixed reactions that highlighted the organization's already failing ability to exercise unified command and control.

Iraqi Security Forces unilaterally began offensive operations against the Mahdi Army in Basra in 2008. This offensive was a long time in coming. For the better part of four years, JAM fighters had migrated to Basra following the original cease fire agreement in 2004. Rival factions including the Sadrist Trend, ISCI, and Fadhila party were seeking to secure control of the city's lucrative infrastructure and institutions.⁷⁴ Based on a premature withdrawal of British forces in 2007, an influx of Iranian weapons and support to the Special Groups, and impending elections in 2008, Maliki ordered the Iraqi Army to conduct offensive operations in Basra. Operation KNIGHT'S CHARGE, spanned March and April of 2008 and ended in success for the Iraqi Security Forces following a relatively slow start.⁷⁵

⁷² Cochrane, "Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement."

⁷³ Cochrane, "Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement."

⁷⁴ Marisa Cochrane, "The Battle for Basra," *Iraq Report 9*, Institute for the Study of War, 4, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/Iraq%20Report%209.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Cochrane, "The Battle for Basra," 7-9.

In the period between 2008 and 2011, Muqtada al-Sadr was noticeably absent, having returned to Iran in order to complete his religious study. The ultimate anticipated result of this study would be the reacquisition of his father's political and religious legacy.⁷⁶ In the midst of the fighting Muqtada al-Sadr called for a cease fire on 30 March, to little effect. Ultimately, the actions in Basra signaled the end of JAM as a unified entity. Due to the pressures placed on the organization by Iraqi and coalition security forces, compromised command and control structures, and Iranian influence, Muqtada al-Sadr could no longer control the Special Groups.

In the Mahdi Army's life cycle, dominated by an overall trend towards faction, there are several defining moments. The first was the set of coordinated attacks in 2004; the second was the Coalition surge from 2006-2008; the final event was the Iraqi Security Forces' campaign in Basra in 2008. Arguably, the Mahdi Army began changing as an organization as soon as the dust had settled from its failed uprising in 2004. This period was characterized by a strategic change in direction by Muqtada al-Sadr and increasing influence by its Iranian supporters. The aftermath of the combat in 2004 left the Mahdi Army with a set of very significant evolutionary variations that would remain with the group through 2012. Due to the actions of coalition and Iraqi security forces, the Mahdi Army became a largely underground organization following the August 2004 ceasefire. This change made effective command and control, namely the enforcement of the cease fire itself, much more difficult.

The second period, leading up to and including the surge, saw a change primarily in adversary actions. Not only was there an increased targeting effort on the part of Coalition and Iraqi forces, but increasingly more complex challenges presented themselves in the form of rival

⁷⁶ Elie Abouaoun, *Iraq's al-Sadr Movement*, June 2, 2011, <http://www.usip.org/publications/iraqs-al-sadr-movement>.

non- and sub-state actors. Rival Shi'a factions like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and its military arm, the Badr Corps challenged the Mahdi Army for control of resources and influence.⁷⁷ At the same time, al-Qaeda in Iraq gradually drove rising levels of sectarian violence to a fever pitch.⁷⁸ These adversary actions prompted an increased reliance on Iranian support as well as sanctioned and unsanctioned efforts to defeat threats to the Mahdi Army and the Shi'a population it strove to protect. Specifically, this meant that additional Mahdi Army offices were opened, there was open conflict with Badr elements, and death squads sought to forcibly relocate Sunni families. The sustainment capability required to manage this manifested itself in the form of largely criminal activities including extortion and protection money, managed by low to mid-level JAM neighborhood leaders. Ultimately the period between 2006 and 2008 would further isolate the Mahdi Army from the population.⁷⁹

The final stage of the Mahdi Army's life cycle runs from 2008 to present, and includes significant targeting by increasingly adept Iraqi Security Forces as well as efforts on the part of Muqtada al-Sadr to consolidate the organization. By 2009, the Sadrists were achieving some success in the political arena, mounting a challenge to their ISCI and Islamic Party of Iraq rivals.⁸⁰ In its current form, the Mahdi Army includes a purely academic arm, the Mumahidoon, and an armed wing, the Promised Day Brigades. The importance of these two organization lies in the fact that they are both under Muqtada's direct control, whereas the various Special Groups, Former Special Groups, Kataib Hezbollah, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq elements are not. These three

⁷⁷ Cockburn, 174.

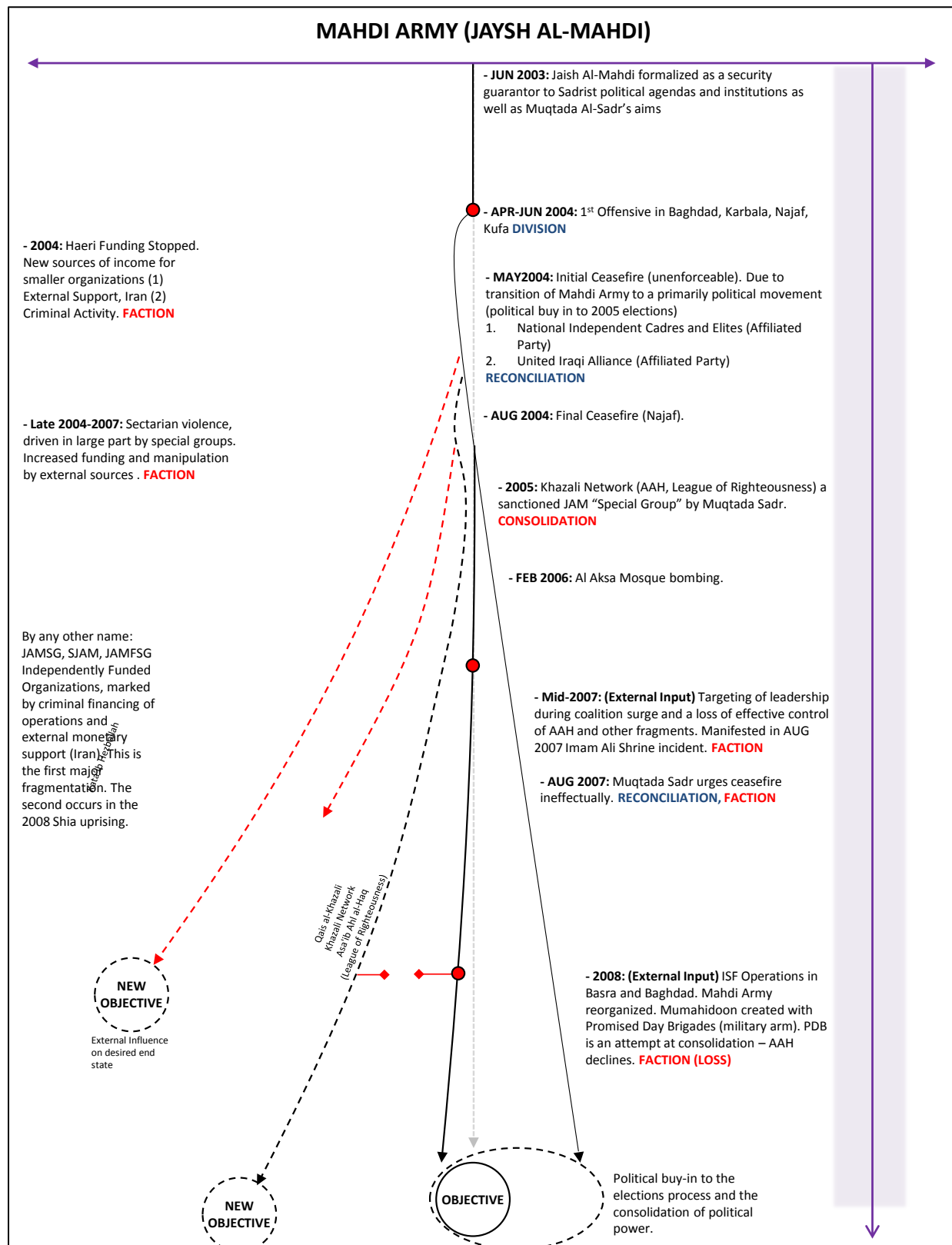
⁷⁸ Cockburn, 183.

⁷⁹ Bill Ardolino, "Iraqis begin to 'despise' the Mahdi Army in Baghdad's Rusafa district," *The Long War Journal*, May 3, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/05/iraqis_despise_the_m.php.

⁸⁰ Herring, 203.

stages represent the dual effects of faction and reconciliation trends on a terrorist group. In this case, The Mahdi Army in its official capacity became more inclined over time to take part in the political process in Iraq. At the same time, the combined effects of Iranian support, Coalition and Iraqi targeting, and infighting between rival groups led to changes that made the organization vulnerable to faction.

Figure 2: The Evolution of the Mahdi Army



Appendix 2

Al-Qaeda in Iraq: The Limits of a Unifying Ideology

Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) is one case study in the long list of ideologically linked insurgencies exported by al Qaeda. The focal point of this organization was initially a man named Abu Musab al Zarqawi, and he ultimately proved unable to effectively market his armed struggle to the Iraqi people. Zarqawi, a Jordanian Salafist, underestimated the importance of Iraqi tribal culture and its relationship to al Qaeda's ideology. This catastrophic failure led to the organization's inability to achieve success in Iraq, despite multiple attempts to make Al Qaeda's insurgency a distinctly Iraqi fight. Al Qaeda in Iraq is of particular interest because it reflects a trend of radicalization and division from the Iraqi polity as well as faction with respect to its parent organization. These two effects were driven by a combination of AQI's leadership and the realities of geography. Al Qaeda's experience in Iraq demonstrates the limits of its ideology as a consolidating force when interpreted by disparate populations in the midst of an insurgency. At the same time, it also serves as a cautionary tale, as current events in Iraq lead some to highlight a potential failure on the part of Coalition forces and Iraqi government to capitalize on these trends.

Al Qaeda is also a complex case because it challenges the relationships between terrorism and insurgency. In broad terms, Al Qaeda preserves the goal of instating a global caliphate under the rule of Sharia law. It maintains that the two greatest threats to the realization of this objective are apostasy in the Muslim world and the hostile encroachment of the western world. Due to the nature of its objectives, the organization exemplifies many characteristics of a revolutionary insurgency, but with one major difference. Al Qaeda is not confined to a state but is pursuing

what could be called a transnational insurgency motivated by totalitarian Islamism.⁸¹ The movement is difficult to label because of this relationship between its global revolutionary objective and the local character of the conflicts it engages in.⁸² One can describe this dynamic as a relationship between two types of revolution, one being a more Maoist struggle globally, and the other one a local struggle that more often than not resembles a Che Guevara-like foco strategy of armed action.⁸³

The challenge that Al Qaeda must overcome globally then, is that of marketing localized insurgencies, motivated by a universal ideology, but executed by very different peoples. There are multiple instances of Al Qaeda and its allies attempting to brand the Sunni insurgency in Iraq as a domestically grown one, one being the suicide bombing on FOB Marez in Mosul on December 21, 2004. This attack was quickly claimed by Ansar al-Sunna, a group allied with AQI, and the group expended the effort to paint the martyr as a local Iraqi man, recruited from Mosul. The truth was that the attacker was instead a foreign volunteer from Saudi Arabia.⁸⁴ This pattern would come to exemplify Al Qaeda's operations in the country.

Al Qaeda's ideology is defined by the writings of distinct set of scholars representing a particular interpretation of their religion. This group starts with Sayyid Qutb, whose teachings defined the tenets of a combined Wahhabi-Salafi ideology.⁸⁵ Later, this developing ideology was

⁸¹ Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "Al Qaeda From the Near Enemy to the Far Enemy and Back," *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics*, edited by Klejda Mulaj (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 209.

⁸² COL Michael Morris, "Al Qaeda as Insurgency," *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 39, October 2005, 5-7.

⁸³ Morris, 7.

⁸⁴ GEN(RET) Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, (New York: Penguin, 2013), 169.

⁸⁵ Sookhdeo, "Ideas Matter," 234-235.

influenced by Abdullah Azzam, and finally, Ayman al Zawahiri.⁸⁶ The result is a set of utopian goals, rooted in an interpretation of the Islamic faith, and propagated through its training program. This brand of Salafist theology demands violent action to establish theocratic governance, justifies holy war as the means to an end, and encourages the use of terrorism as a method to achieve its objectives. It is at the heart of al-Qaeda's ideology. Its goals are the establishment of the rule of God on Earth, the achievement of martyrdom in the cause of God, and the purification of the ranks of Islam. This insight, taken from the handwritten notes of a student, illustrates the relationship between the near and far enemies.⁸⁷ The ideology itself, propagated through a shared educational experience, offers any organization founded in the image of al-Qaeda's global jihad a relatively strong consolidating force at its inception.

In 1984, Osama Bin Laden had established a way station in Peshawar under the name of Bayt al-Ansar (The House of the Supporters) meant to receive fighters before they were sent into the Afghan *Mujahedin* training camps. At this time, Bin Laden did not have his own camps and the majority of these fighters were sent to Afghan warlords for training. He would establish his own training camps by 1986. In 1988, he created an office charged with the creation of a register that was to record the names of active mujahedeen in Afghanistan so that their families could be

⁸⁶ Presentation on Irregular Warfare to Marine Corps Command and Staff College, (Quantico, VA: March 22, 2013).

⁸⁷ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2006), 341-342. Lawrence Wright also discusses a student's set of notes that names the specific "enemies of Islam." This list includes Shiites, Heretics (The Mubaraks of the World), America, and Israel. This is often referred to as the "Near Enemy" and the "Far Enemy." The near enemy resides in the Dhar al-Islam, or among the peoples ruled by the Koran. The far enemy resides in the Dhar al-Harb, or the areas of the world not under the governance or control of Islam. He notes here that this list of near and far enemies would cause some friction within the organization as personalities and priorities clashed.

notified in the event of their death. The name of this register was Al Qaeda (the base, or foundation).⁸⁸ This was the origin of both the organization and its name.

It was from this type of pairing of ideology and localized geographic execution that the Tawhid al-Jihad (TAJ) was conceived. The Tawhid al-Jihad (TAJ) is one of two organizations that can be cited as the direct precursor to al-Qaeda in Iraq. Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi created the organization in the 1990's in Afghanistan as an al-Qaeda affiliated group, but not a subordinate element by any means. It began as a training camp, largely funded by Al Qaeda, and then much later grew into an autonomous organization by 2003. From a geographical standpoint, its area of interest was Turkey, Israel, and Jordan prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001.⁸⁹

While in agreement on certain aspects of ideology, Zarqawi and Usama Bin Laden had a tenuous relationship. A more accurate description would be that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi benefited al-Qaeda despite those aspects of his ideology that were at odds with those of Al Qaeda. The interaction between the two groups prior to 2004 was primarily conducted by a middle man, Saif al-Adl, who served as Al Qaeda's deputy military chief.⁹⁰ In fact, based on American operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world, Usama Bin Laden had to ultimately accept the reality of decentralized command and control after 2003. This included granting Zarqawi the latitude to conduct operations in Iraq as he saw fit, within certain limits.⁹¹ The limits of this latitude would later be tested in 2005 and 2006.

⁸⁸ Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of Al Qaeda*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006, 44.

⁸⁹ Richard H. Schultz Jr. and Andrea J. Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 236-237.

⁹⁰ McChrystal, 194.

⁹¹ Jerold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007, 223.

If al-Qaeda was surprised by U.S. actions in Afghanistan, they were likely not so startled by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. While the organization had been preparing for such an eventuality for some time, it is unlikely that al-Qaeda could foresee the level of initial success that Operation IRAQI FREEDOM met with or the rapid collapse of Iraqi resistance during the invasion.⁹² With its core under pressure in Afghanistan, the introduction of Coalition forces into Iraq forced a meeting engagement of sorts. Regardless of the reason for Coalition intervention, Iraq soon became a theater of conflict that neither side, the U.S. or al Qaeda, could afford to lose. For the United States, it was necessary to win in Iraq to establish the precedent of democracy triumphing over totalitarian Islamism. For Al Qaeda, the successful defense of Iraq was necessary if its ideology and stated objectives were to have any strategic relevance. While bearing some weight, the fact that Iraq was the historical seat of the Abbasid Caliphate was likely a secondary consideration for al Qaeda.⁹³ In reality, it was the access provided by the country's geographical location and the opportunity to attrit U.S. combat power that drew al Qaeda into a vital struggle in Iraq.⁹⁴

In the early days of his campaign, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi met with some initial success. During this period, the TAJ's targets were almost entirely Coalition Forces. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi grew a long standing relationship with the primarily Kurdish Islamist terrorist group Ansar al-Sunna. Ansar al-Sunna (currently named Ansar al-Islam) is the second organization that could be referenced in discussions of al-Qaeda in Iraq's founding core. Ansar al-Sunna sheltered Al Qaeda fighters that fled Afghanistan in September of 2001, to include Abu Musab al-

⁹² Daniel L. Byman, "The History of Al Qaeda" (Brookings) September 1, 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/09/01-al-qaeda-history-byman>.

⁹³ Paul Rogers, *Iraq and the War on Terror* (New York: I.B. Taurus and Co. Ltd., 2006). p. 74.

⁹⁴ Schultz and Dew, 238.

Zarqawi.⁹⁵ By 2004, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi was the leader of a like-minded organization rather than a branch affiliate of Mother al-Qaeda. Despite this relatively loose link, he described his course of action in a letter to Ayman al-Zawahiri in February of 2004.⁹⁶ In order to have success in Iraq, Zarqawi did not need to defeat Coalition forces. Rather, all that was required was to ensure that Coalition goals were impossible to achieve. This demonstration required a fully disenfranchised Sunni population. This realization on the part of Zarqawi would have strategic implications for Al Qaeda. It marked a departure from Al Qaeda's focus on the far enemy, the United States, towards a near enemy, the Shi'a population of Iraq. The organization officially became al-Qaeda in Iraq when Zarqawi pledged his allegiance to Usama Bin Laden in October 2004.⁹⁷ The agreement was a strategic decision on the part of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, one that would bring resources, funding, and most importantly, a call from Usama Bin Laden for foreign fighters to cross into Iraq in order to fight with the newly renamed al-Qaeda Iraq.⁹⁸

By mid-2004 Zarqawi estimated that the Iraqi people and government demonstrating a dangerous level of cooperation with the American forces in the country. He also saw rival movements in Shi'a militias like the Mahdi Army. While he had achieved some success in forging a unified Islamist resistance under AQI, the tribal culture of rural Iraq proved a daunting obstacle in the consolidation of the insurgency. In light of these setbacks, Al-Qaeda in Iraq became more indiscriminate in its violence, targeting not just Coalition Forces but also Iraqi

⁹⁵ Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan," *Human Rights Watch*, February 5, 2003, <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/mena/ansarbk020503.htm>.

⁹⁶ *Al-Qaeda in its Own Words*, edited by Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, translated by Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). 261-264.

⁹⁷ Martha Crenshaw, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, updated February 12 2010, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1#note7>.

⁹⁸ McChrystal, 178.

citizens. These attacks focused on Iraq's Shi'a population and incited a wave of sectarian violence that would escalate through 2008.

While it is likely that Zarqawi's general plan for defeating the US in Iraq was in line with the wishes of Mother Al Qaeda, there are also a number of signs that indicate a growing ideological chasm between the two organizations. One of the first and most telling of these came from an external source in the form of text written by Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi in 2004. It is important to note here that al-Maqdisi was not a part of al-Qaeda, but a prolific Jordanian Jihadi theorist who at one time was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's spiritual mentor.⁹⁹ Incarcerated in Jordan at the time, Maqdisi was very critical of his former student, citing Zarqawi's targeting of civilians, the attacks on Iraqi Shi'as while at prayer in mosques, and an overall failure to empower Iraqi fighters with the responsibility of the resistance.¹⁰⁰

A second sign came in July 2005, when Ayman al-Zawahiri sent a letter to Zarqawi warning him of the consequences of his targeting selections and the impending loss of support from a number of organizations. This letter read, in part:

We are extremely concerned, as are the mujahedeen and all sincere Muslims, about your Jihad and your heroic acts until you reach its intended goal. Therefore, I stress again to you and to all your brothers the need to direct the political action equally with the military action, by the alliance, cooperation and gathering of all leaders of opinion and influence in the Iraqi arena.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Militant Ideology Atlas*, edited by William McCants, (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), 219.

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Qaeda in its Own Words*, 246-247.

¹⁰¹ Post, 223. There is still much debate over the amount of true command and control central al-Qaeda exerts over its affiliates. Circumstances and the nature of the organization together dictate a decentralized form of command control that demands the independent execution of operations in a decentralized fashion based on intent. In the case of AQI, it is certainly evident that the distance was great enough and the environment non-permissive enough to preclude the physical enforcement of central al-Qaeda policy. That being said, there is enough evidence to suggest central al-Qaeda's disapproval with the handling of its franchise in Iraq.

Discounting the tenuous relationship between Zarqawi and al-Qaeda prior to 2003, this provides the first tangible evidence of faction between al-Qaeda in Iraq and its parent organization.

A series of events unfolded between 2004 and 2005 that would have lasting effects on al-Qaeda in Iraq's future. First, throughout 2004 pressure continued to mount on Al Qaeda in Iraq from Coalition forces.¹⁰² Second, on 9 November, 2005, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi targeted three hotels in Amman, Jordan. These attacks claimed the lives of 60 people, and left 115 wounded.¹⁰³ This attack was conducted as a reprisal for Jordanian actions in support of the United States, but it was one that, because of its publicity and the nature of the target, had a polarizing effect on AQI's supporters.¹⁰⁴

In another attempt to place an Iraqi face on its exported insurgency, Al-Qaeda in Iraq joined the Mujahadeen Shura Council (MSC) in January 2006. This was the first of two such umbrella organizations that would serve as fronts for AQI. The umbrella organization, created to attempt an appeal to the increasingly alienated Shiite groups, was established by al-Qaeda in order to rebrand itself in the face of impending defeat.¹⁰⁵ In addition to AQI, it included, Jaish al-Taifa al-Mansoura, al-Ahwal Brigades, Islamic Jihad Brigades, al-Ghuraba Brigades, and Saraya

¹⁰² McChrystal, 182.

¹⁰³ McChrystal, 197.

¹⁰⁴ Scott MacLeod, "Behind the Amman Hotel Attack," Time, November 10, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1128209,00.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Martha Crenshaw, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, updated February 12 2010, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1#note7>.

Ansar al-Tawhid.¹⁰⁶ Despite the concern of al-Qaeda's senior leadership, al-Zarqawi did not curb his deviation from the ideological mean, claiming responsibility for suicide attacks in Jordan just a few short months after receiving the Zawahiri Letter.¹⁰⁷

Abu Musab Zarqawi was killed in June 2006 and replaced by Abu Ayub al-Masri within two weeks of his demise. Al-Masri established the second of its umbrella organizations, the Islamic State of Iraq in October of the same year in an attempt to place a more Iraqi face on AQI.¹⁰⁸ The ISI's stated purpose was now not only the enforcement of Sharia law, but also the protection of Iraqi Sunnis, the prevention of infighting among factions, and the consolidation of the movement under Mother al-Qaeda. This second organization not only included the original founding groups in the MSC, but also the Jaish al-Fatiheen, Jund al-Sahaba, Kataeb Ansar al-Tawheed wal-Sunnah, and several tribal chiefs. In an attempt to further legitimize the organization in the eyes of Iraqis, al-Masri declared Abdullah Rashid al-Baghdadi the Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq. One very significant difference between this new manifestation of AQI and the old MSC was a territorial claim; the ISI declared its governance of a significant portion of the country, including Ramadi, Sunni portions of Baghdad, and the Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Nineveh Provinces, as well as parts of Babil and Wasit.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ "Terrorist Organization Profile: Mujahadeen Shura Council," National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the responses to Terrorism (University of Maryland), http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=4575.

¹⁰⁷ Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007, 224.

¹⁰⁸ "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, updated February 12 2010, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1#note7>

¹⁰⁹ "Terrorist Organization Profile: Mujahadeen Shura Council," National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the responses to Terrorism (University of Maryland), http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=4575.

This trend of factionalism in al-Qaeda so well demonstrated in Iraq is certainly not unique to the case. In 2008, Sayyid Imam al-Sahrif, a senior Islamic cleric, wrote a book that attacked al-Qaeda and goes so far as to accuse Usama Bin Laden and Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi of apostasy. Among the list of al-Sharif's claims is an accusation that al-Qaeda has established what amounts to a heretical school of jurisprudence for the sole purpose of justifying its actions. At the time of the book's writing, al-Sharif was in an Egyptian prison, leaving some to question its authenticity. Whether or not this is true may prove irrelevant as Ayman al-Zawahiri felt the need to publish a lengthy rebuttal to his long time associate's accusations.¹¹⁰

Looking at AQI's case, the most influential variables at play were leadership and geographical reality. These two, combined with the parent organization's need to, under significant duress, resort to more decentralized methods of command and control, led to the divergence of al-Qaeda in Iraq's ideology and its methods. It was not until coalition forces killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that this dynamic was broken, but by this time, the damage had been done, and faction prevailed in the system of alliances that AQI had established prior to 2006.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq demonstrates two major organizational trends, one internal and one external, between 2005 and 2007. Both were caused by the targeting of Iraqi civilian targets by AQI that began in late 2004 as part of a greater rise in sectarian violence. Together, they signaled a deviation from the group's original objectives to such a degree that it would ultimately place AQI's methods at odds with its ends and those of Mother Al-Qaeda. The first noticeable change in the organization was the widening ideological disagreement between Al-Qaeda in Iraq

¹¹⁰ Patrick Sookhdeo, "Ideas Matter," *Toward a Grand Strategy Against Terrorism*, edited by Christopher C. Harmon, Andrew N. Pratt and Sebastian Gorka (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 237.

under Zarqawi, and Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda. This represented a redirection of effort from the far enemy in the United States, to the near enemy in Iraq.

The second change in the organization came with fissures that ultimately widened between many of the affiliated groups both under the Al Qaeda in Iraq umbrella organizations and outside of them. The Islamic Army of Iraq is one among many other smaller groups that distanced itself from AQI by 2007.¹¹¹ These splits manifested themselves in open conflict between groups in some cases, most notably in that of the Islamic Army of Iraq.¹¹² While al-Qaeda in Iraq remains active and indeed the largest of the violent Sunni groups in Iraq, it has been largely unsuccessful in its attempts to insert a sharia administration of governance through the ISI.

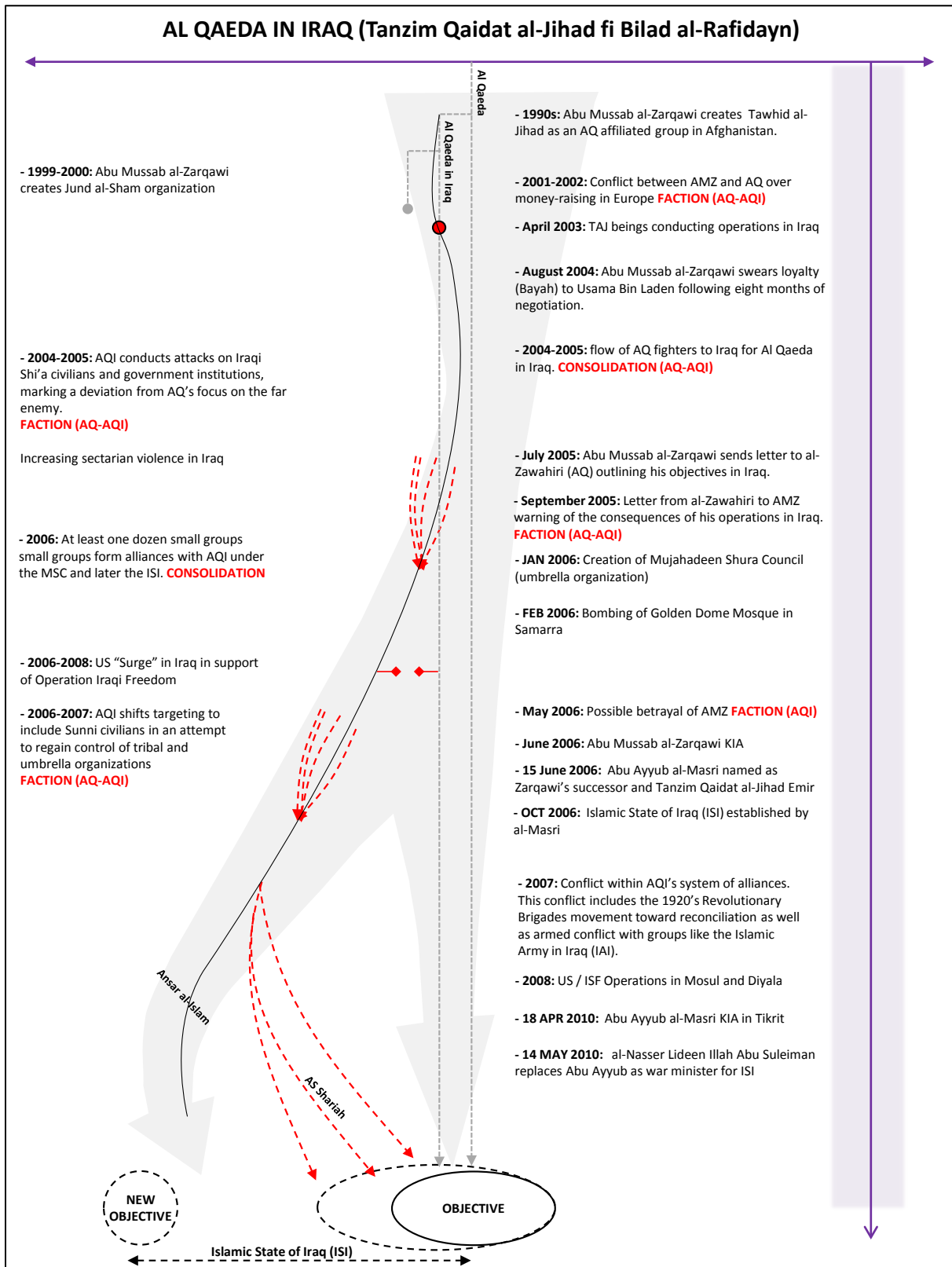
Despite a significant loss of relevance and capability, al Qaeda in Iraq is far from eradicated. In the months and years following the U.S. withdrawal of forces from Iraq, AQI has proven resilient and even resurgent due to the consistent mismanagement of sectarian grievances by the Iraqi government. Inabilities to shape policies that undermine the root causes of violence have plagued the Iraqi government since 2010. Prime Minister Maliki has made a series of provocative moves that have marginalized the Sunni participation in governance. These moves have included the arrest of two ministers.¹¹³ Al-Qaeda in Iraq, an organization that was all but irrelevant in the waning days of 2010, has taken advantage of this opportunity by attacking Sahwa leaders in the Diyala and Anbar Provinces as well as inciting a renewed sectarian conflict.

¹¹¹ Bobby Ghosh, "A Truce between U.S. Enemies in Iraq," *Time*, June 06, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1629871,00.html>.

¹¹² Beehner, Lionel, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq: Resurging or Splintering?" *Council on Foreign Relations Background*, July 16, 2007, http://www.cfr.org/publication/13007/alqaeda_in_iraq.html.

¹¹³ Kimberly Kagan, "Iraq's Return to Bloodshed-WAPO," Institute for the Study of War, February 8, 2013, <http://www.understandingwar.org/publications/commentaries/iraqs-return-bloodshed-wapo>.

Figure 3: The Evolution of al-Qaeda in Iraq



Appendix 3

HAMAS Iraq: The Influence of Adversaries and the Exploitation of Faction

The National Islamic Resistance, later known as HAMAS Iraq, in Iraq falls into a different category than that of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). This organization is primarily made up of Sunni rejectionists with a flair for the nationalist rather than the Salafist movement that AQI represents.¹¹⁴ While the organization does in fact desire a state governed by Islamist principles, they are better characterized by their resistance to foreign occupation rather than their Islamist connections.¹¹⁵ The National Islamic Resistance in Iraq, under continuous pressure from al-Qaeda and suffering a series of losses within the ranks of its senior leadership that stripped it of consolidating force, fractured due to a fundamental conflict between its traditional tribal culture and an imported Islamist ideology.

The National Islamic Resistance in Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades (Kata'ib Thawrat al-Ishreen) are relative footnotes in the overall Sunni insurgency in Iraq. The organization has been known by several names and when referenced at all, is often referenced in such loose umbrella terms as "Sunni rejectionists." The origin of the group is in an organization started in 2003 called The National Islamic Resistance in Iraq. At its formation, the leadership of this organization created the 1920's Revolutionary Brigades in Iraq as an armed wing.¹¹⁶ The

¹¹⁴ Richard H. Shultz and Andrea J. Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006). 233-234.

¹¹⁵ Martha Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, February 12 2010, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/57>.

¹¹⁶ Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades."

name itself is derived from the 1920 uprising that occurred in Iraq in opposition to British colonization.¹¹⁷

Very little is known about the specifics of the National Islamic Resistance in Iraq's founding. The National Islamic Resistance in Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades drew their original membership from two sources, the Sunni tribes in Diyala and Anbar Provinces, and the former regime elements that remained in the wake of de-Ba'athification following the U.S. invasion in 2003. Both the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades and its parent organization are inextricably linked to the country's tribal culture. In the Sunni-dominated rural areas north and west of Baghdad, there are approximately ten known and large tribal federations. These include household names like al-Dulaym and Shammar Jarba, both of which extend north and west out of the capitol and stretch to the Syrian and Jordanian borders. Smaller federations that are commonly known include the al-Jubbur, al-Ubayd, and al-Mushahada.¹¹⁸ Each of these has its own set of relationships with other tribes, but all share a common tribal culture. Many tribes cross sectarian thresholds, a fact that will prove important to the course of the organization's lifecycle.

In the broader context of the conflict in Iraq, Hamas Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade are true insurgencies, labeled "terrorist" for many given actions. The organization attempted to steer clear of sectarian violence, which increased in frequency between 2003 and 2007. Even so, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades, as the armed wing of the National Islamic Resistance Movement in Iraq, did commit some acts that fall within the definition of terrorism,

¹¹⁷ "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Department of Defense, *Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008* (Section 9204, Public Law 110-252), October 30, 2009. 22-3.

¹¹⁸ Amatzia Baram, "Who are the Insurgents?" *Special Report 134* (Washington, D.C.: The United Institute of Peace, April 2005). 5, <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr134.pdf>.

to include hostage taking. An early example of such an act occurred in 2004 when the group used a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) to attack the al-Arabiya television network headquarters in Baghdad.¹¹⁹

An important influence on the strategic planning of the National Islamic Resistance in Iraq was the Association of Muslim Scholars. This association is the spiritual manifestation of the Sunni Arab tribal resistance in Iraq, and Harith Sulayman al-Dahri is generally accepted as the spiritual leader of the Sunni insurgency. He established the Association of Muslim Scholars in April of 2003.¹²⁰ This organization had the effect of consolidating and mobilizing the base of the Sunni insurgency in the early days following the U.S. invasion.

Al-Dahri initially embraced al-Qaeda in Iraq as a benefit to the Iraqi insurgency. He stated in 2003 that the Mujahadeen Shura Council was “part of the legitimate resistance...these factions attack the occupation forces and do not target the civilians because it is a resistance that broke out immediately at the beginning of the occupation. These factions do not receive support from any foreign party.”¹²¹ This statement is a clear manipulation of fact, most likely done for political reasons in order to consolidate the tribes under an insurgency that was in fact Iraqi on its face. Between 2003 and 2007, however, al-Dahri’s opinion and policy towards al-Qaeda in Iraq has varied. In 2007, he claimed that “Ayman al-Zawahiri does not represent Iraqis.” This statement came amidst a series of attacks launched in 2006 and 2007 by al-Qaeda aimed at

¹¹⁹ “Seven die in Baghdad bomb blast,” *BBC News*, 30 October 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3967843.stm.

¹²⁰ “The HAMAS Charter,” August 18, 1988, *The Avalon Project* (New Haven, CT: Yale - Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008), http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

¹²¹ Bill Roggio, “Sunni clerics turn on Association of Muslim Scholars,” *The Long War Journal*, November 17, 2007, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/sunni_clerics_turn_o.php#ixzz2LuUZQMqO.

killing senior Iraqi tribal leaders that were either non-committal towards al-Qaeda or outright hostile to the terrorist group. Al-Qaeda's hardline stance toward tribal leaders that refused to fall in line reflects the organization's distance from traditional Iraqi tribal values and priorities. This in turn urged many to begin a dialogue aimed at least limited reconciliation with Coalition Forces and the Iraqi government.¹²²

The National Islamic Resistance in Iraq was opposed to the U.S. occupation of Iraq and fostered ties with Al Qaeda early in its resistance. Its first attack was recorded in August 2004 when the group claimed responsibility for the attacks on two US helicopters, one in Fallujah and one near Abu Ghuraib.¹²³ At the same time, HAMAS Iraq urged Iraqi national government employees to abandon their jobs based on a claim that the government had essentially walked away from the people of Fallujah.

As indicated by its name change in 2007, the National Islamic Resistance in Iraq was heavily influenced by the Palestinian Hamas movement, although there are no official connections between the two.¹²⁴ The earliest signs of the shared ideological threads arose in 2006 with a statement of support from the organization for the Lebanese movement.¹²⁵ The HAMAS Charter is a 36 article document that served as a foundation for the Palestinian

¹²² Bill Roggio, "Sunni clerics turn on Association of Muslim Scholars," *The Long War Journal*, November 17, 2007, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/sunni_clerics_turn_o.php#ixzz2LuUZQMqO.

¹²³ Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades."

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

organization's founding. Much of the ideology communicated by this document is echoed in the strategic communications from HAMAS Iraq and the 1920's Revolutionary Brigades.¹²⁶

The group's initial cooperation with al-Qaeda in Iraq would ultimately prove to have negative consequences as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi continued a campaign that over time targeted more Iraqi civilians and government institutions. The relationship between the two sides of the Sunni insurgency, one nationalist and one Islamist, became adversarial. In the end, the evolution of HAMAS Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades was driven by the dynamic of this ally-turned-adversary. Between 2003 and 2007, the two organizations were under constant pressure as AQI attempted to consolidate the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. Both disagreed ideologically with AQI and opposed the targeted killing of Iraqis, believing the practice to be morally wrong and counterproductive. While the whole of HAMAS Iraq wanted to distance itself from AQI, there was an active debate within the organization concerning the precise methods by which it would accomplish this.

In 2007, as attempts to distance itself from AQI continued, the National Islamic Resistance Iraq fractured. The split between Hamas in Iraq and the 1920's Revolutionary Brigades is an important one because it demonstrates an organization fracturing over disagreements concerning the way forward in its dealings with al Qaeda in Iraq. In this case, the largest portion of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades moved towards reconciliation with the government. This group favored a violent opposition to AQI, while its parent organization HAMAS Iraq did not.¹²⁷ This was a defining moment for HAMAS and the 1920s Revolutionary

¹²⁶ "The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance," in *The Avalon Project*, (New Haven, CT: Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, August 18, 1988), http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

¹²⁷ Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades."

Brigades. This split opened up the possibility of reconciliation for some, and a return to its original objectives for others. Many of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade's mid-level leaders joined the Awakening movement in the Anbar and Diyala Provinces in a remarkable display of reconciliation.¹²⁸ At the same time, this reconciliation was far from universal, as the organization continued to claim responsibility for attacks against Coalition Forces and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

The three-way split between the alliance with al-Qaeda in Iraq, HAMAS Iraq, and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades was marked by violence, though it is unclear whether this violence was perpetrated by AQI or HAMAS Iraq as the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades broke away from its parent organization.¹²⁹ The armed struggle between the two continued through 2008 and was marked by the assassination of high level leaders, mostly by suicide bombs.¹³⁰ Due to the number of the organization's leaders that had been killed by AQI, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades lacked any consolidating influence strong enough to focus its methods on its objectives. Between 2005 and 2008, the leadership of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades would change due to hostile action six times.¹³¹ By attacking the tribal leaders that formed the leadership of the 1920's Brigades, it is likely that AQI had severed too many links between HAMAS Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades for it to form a cohesive body.¹³²

¹²⁸ Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades."

¹²⁹ "Truck blasts kill 50 in Iraq town," BBC News, 27 March 2007, retrieved on January 10, 2010 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6500617.stm.

¹³⁰ Crenshaw, "The 1920's Revolutionary Brigades."

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² This point is inferred from personal experience and based on the number of leaders the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades lost in a relatively short period. While it is certainly a debatable point, it is a reasonable assumption given

Since the split between the two now-distinct groups, the 1920's Revolutionary Brigades have gone through several more recent changes. In 2007, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades in conjunction with six other groups joined the Change and Reform Front. The Change and Reform Front was one of several umbrella organizations that merged nationalist and Islamist resistance groups together to prevent a descent into an uncontrolled civil war fought between many small militias. It would also prove to be a forum in which these organizations could align with legitimate political parties as well as a conduit for cooperation between them and the Iraqi Government.¹³³

By 2009, there was some evidence of further faction within the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades.¹³⁴ Due to the relatively secretive nature of the Brigades and the common association of the Sunni resistance with the historical 1920s uprising, it is still relatively hard to determine whether or not the Green Brigades are actually a part of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades or not. This group claimed responsibility for the downing of a British helicopter in 2009, but remained apparently inactive both before and after this attack.¹³⁵

Between the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade's movement toward cooperation with the government and the consistent links between HAMAS and a legitimate political party, this case

the state of the Brigades by 2009. At that point, there was very little visible evidence of a cohesive body in the organization and it seemed to exist more in the minds of isolated members or the Sahwa.

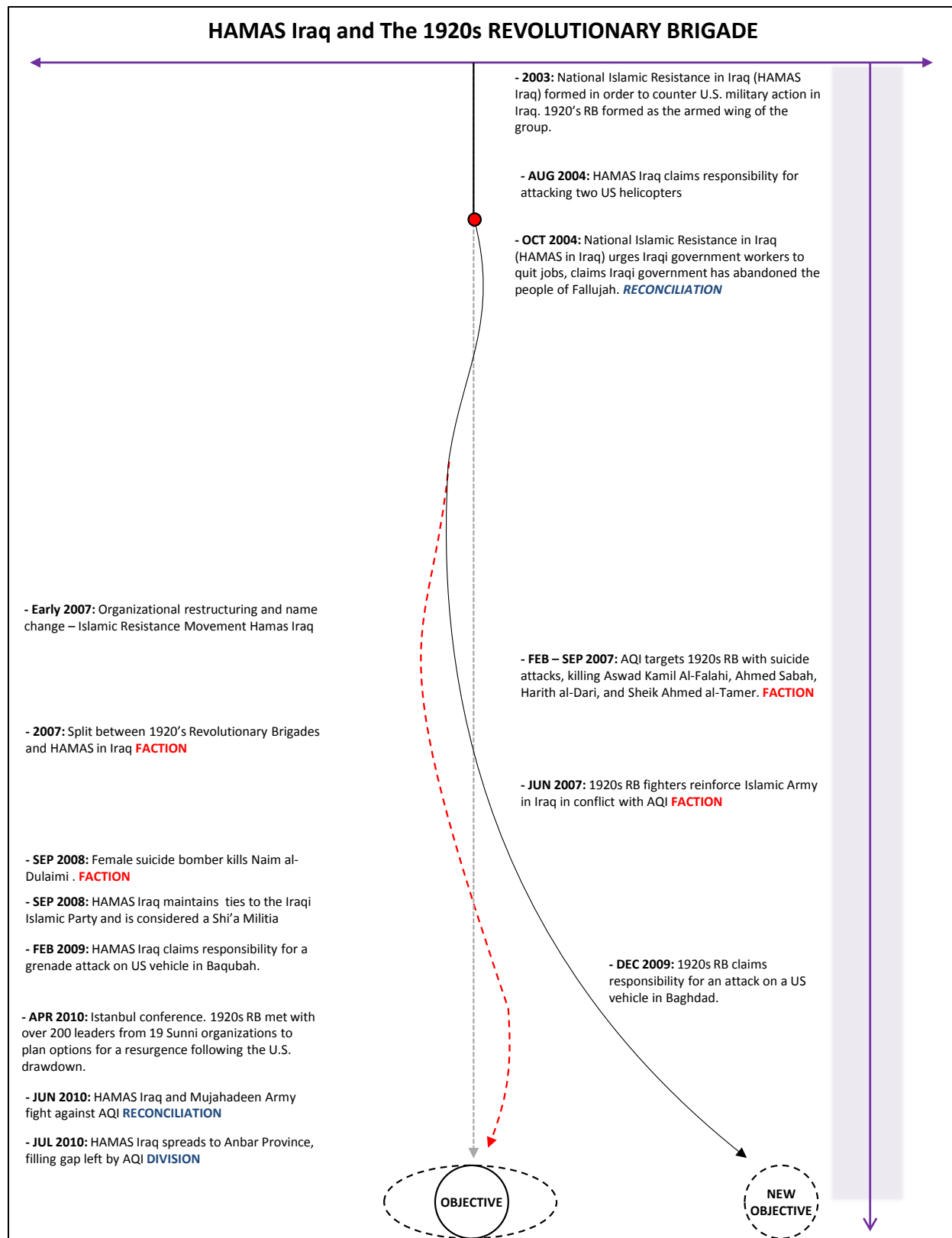
¹³³ Ahmed Janabi, "Iraq's armed groups form alliance," *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2007, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2007/10/20085251837562291.html>.

¹³⁴ There remains a great deal of uncertainty as to the aims of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades. Attacks have been claimed by persons claiming to represent the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades as late as 2009, but the organization had been actively working with the Iraqi Government and Coalition Forces since 2007. It is very likely that the split with HAMAS Iraq and the isolated nature of the organization's cells, driven in large part by the tribal culture that the organization is overlaid on top of, contributes to the amount of faction within the organization.

¹³⁵ "10 Brits Likely Dead in Iraq Crash," *CBS News*, February 11, 2009, http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500257_162-670301.html.

is unique among the three due to the level of reconciliation achieved. Among other things, it represents the successful exploitation of the conditions that lead to the complete fracture of the HAMAS Iraq. The organization was formed with the benefit of the Iraqi tribal culture as a consolidating force. Adversary actions forced the group into an unacceptable conflict between the ideology of AQI and the traditional values espoused by their more nationalist resistance. By emphasizing this rift, Coalition Forces and the Iraqi government were able to co-opt a large part of the 1920's Revolutionary Brigades. Meanwhile, its parent organization, HAMAS Iraq, over time became less relevant.

Figure 4: The Evolution of HAMAS Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades



Appendix 4:

Environmental Influences (Selection) and Organizational Changes (Variation)

Group		Mahdi Army <i>Jalish al-Mahdi</i>	HAMAS Iraq and 1920s Revolutionary Bdes	Al Qaeda Iraq <i>Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn</i>
Timeline		June 2003 - Present 9+ Years	2003 - Present 9+ Years	April 2003 - Present (ISI) 9+ Years
Aims and Objectives		Remove Foreign (US) Occupation Ensure Shi'a Rights and security in Iraqi Government	Remove Foreign (US) Occupation Secure the rights of Sunni's in Iraq Establish Sharia as the basis for any established state	Defeat American Forces in Iraq Establish a caliphate in Iraq
Results		Limited Success, Decline The Mahdi Army has so far survived for nearly a decade of conflict with the United States, the Iraqi Security Forces, and rival Shi'a and Sunni groups. The US did in fact withdraw from Iraq, albeit as a part of a planned move with the approval of the Iraqi government, which was a less than ideal end state for JAM. Due to a movement toward participation in the legitimate political processes of Iraq following the 2004 uprising, the group can claim a certain amount of success in ensuring Shi'a influence on Iraqi domestic politics. Due to a series of alliances, including cooperation between Sadrist and the Badr Corps, Shi'a Iraqis are by far the best represented demographic group, to the detriment of others. JAM did fail to consolidate the Shi'a cause under its banner and become the sole voice of the Shi'a population. In that respect, a number of rival organizations, including the resurgent JAM faction AAH are challenging the group for this role as late as 2012.	Limited Success, Decline The original group can claim a measure of success in its survival as well as a US withdrawal, even though the latter was planned and executed with the support of the government. However, the group has failed to secure an acceptable level of Sunni influence in the governance of Iraq according to some Sunni leaders. Some indication of resurgence due to 2010 meeting in Turkey with other militant groups to discuss a way forward in post-OIF Iraq. As of January, 2013, however, any major undertaking has gone unrealized, and moderate elements of this group that sided with the Awakening movement have been targeted by a resurgent AQI.	Failure, Resurgent Current Strength is estimated at approximately 1,000, although a large portion of the group's energy is currently spent conducting operations in support of Syrian rebels against the Assad regime. As of 2012, AQI under the façade of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) has taken advantage of the Iraqi government's instability and poor address of Sunni concerns of marginalization. ISI is encouraging sectarian violence in an attempt to reinvigorate and consolidate a dormant Sunni insurgency.
Influences on Selection and Retention of Traits	Leadership	Absent 2008-2011 (Iran) Muqtada al-Sadr's legitimacy drawn from family ties (father) and continuing religious study. This legitimacy is bolstered in some ways by a relationship with Iran, but is also undercut by overt attempts by Iranian agents to subvert his leadership by supporting Badr.	Imbedded in and draws legitimacy from the tribal culture of Iraq (al-Dulaim). Initial military leadership was drawn in large part from former regime elements as a result of de-Ba'athification or the demobilization of the Iraqi Army in 2003.	Distant higher headquarters, the ability to command stressed further by pressure placed on C2 systems and AQ leadership in Afghanistan. Jordanian leadership of Iraq's AQ franchise (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi)
	Geography	The Mahdi Army draws its strength from traditionally Shi'a cities and havens, including Basra, Najaf, Nasiriyah, Mahmudiyah, and Sadr City. At varying times, it has sought refuge inside of the borders in Iran.	Physical: The largely agricultural land in the Anbar and Diyala provinces highlighted distinct differences between Iraq's urban population, including a largely Shi'a majority in the cities, and the rural population, made up of primarily Sunnis. Human: Tribal traditions in the North and Western parts of Iraq are a strong consolidating force for Hamas Iraq and the 1920's Revolutionary Brigades.	Physical: The distance between the Al Qaeda senior leadership and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi left him, much like the leaders of many other global branch affiliates, with a great deal of latitude in how he conducted his operations in Iraq. Human: In its initial stages, the vast majority of AQI's campaign in Iraq was fought by foreign fighters, despite an IO campaign to the contrary. AQ had a difficult time and ultimately failed in consolidating a Sunni insurgency when it began attacking Iraqi civilians. By the time that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed, the damage had been done, and a gap between the group's objectives (ends) and its methods (ways) drove the group farther away from any ideological mean in Iraq. Its recent potential for resurgence notwithstanding, this contributed heavily to the group's trend towards division and its ultimate irrelevance by 2008.
	Relationships and Alliances	External State Actors: Iranian Revolutionary Guard - Quds Force Non-State Actors and Political Parties: National Independent Cadres and Elites United Iraqi Alliance The relationships of the Mahdi Army to both external actors and Iraqi political parties was a major source of the organizations fundamental split, the beginning of which occurred in 2004-2005.	External State Actors: None Non-State Actors and Political Parties: al-Qaeda* Arbar Salvation Council Change and Reform Council Iraq Islamic Party HAMAS Iraq and the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades have maintained a level of cooperation with al-Qaeda throughout its history, although the extent to which that cooperation results in any material support is minimal. For the most part, the organization distances itself from al-Qaeda except when ISI makes a statement that is in support of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq.	External State Actors: There is some evidence to suggest that Iran has offered assistance an safe haven to Al Qaeda in Iraq, particularly after its relative defeat in 2008. Non-State Actors and Political Parties: While Al Qaeda in Iraq's relationship with Al Qaeda has been strained at times, in the period between 2004 and 2005, a substantial amount of support was shared between the two, indicating a mutual understanding of purpose, if not intent and method. Of note, the MSC and ISI represent political manifestations of AQI's end state in Iraq. They are both attempts to consolidate the insurgency and establish a governing body in preparation for the realization of the Caliphate in Iraq.
	Adversary Responses	Military: Continuous targeting, although with some restrictions based on the nature of negotiations and political participation on the part of JAM leadership. Group also involved in nearly constant conflict with rival organizations. Diplomatic: In addition to a planned movement into politics on the part of the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr, the Iraqi government also instituted a policy of reconciliation for Shi'a militia members, which proved to erode, in conjunction with military force, the capability of the organization. In effect, it drew the moderate militiaman from JAM, leaving a widening gap between the parent organization and its factions.	Military: Each Shia uprising, beginning in 2004 was met with decisive military action by either the Coalition, the Iraqi Security Forces, or both. Diplomatic: Between 2007 and 2008, the Iraqi Government, due in large part to Shi'a Parliamentary support, began programs that encouraged the reconciliation of former militia members.	Military: al-Qaeda in Iraq was a priority in Iraq for Coalition forces and ultimately Iraqi Security Forces. A Joint Special Operations Task Force was almost exclusively focused on this targeting effort from 2003-2006. Later, during the Anbar and Diyala Awakening movements, a groundswell of armed resistance to al-Qaeda began in the tribal areas to the North and West of Baghdad.
	Organizational Changes	Faction Political and ideological divergence was evident in a wide spectrum of objectives, ranging from organized crime to the overt support of Iranian interests. Reconciliation The 2004 uprisings granted the organization enough political capital among Shi'a's to make political participation a viable course of action. Division Alliances have consequences, in this case, the subversion of some elements of the group's original ideology and political goals by foreign (Iranian) elements.	Faction HAMAS Iraq and its military wing, the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades, split over disagreements concerning courses of action to take with respect to al Qaeda in Iraq. The bottom line in this split was the decision to engage AQI militarily (1920s Revolutionary Brigades) or not (HAMAS Iraq). Reconciliation A large portion of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigades became a part of the Awakening and the Sons of Iraq Movement. This decision would ultimately have ramifications felt following the departure of Coalition forces in 2010.	Division Al Qaeda's ideology lends itself to a lack of reconciliation; there is very little to negotiate in their construct. In an attempt to exploit sectarian divides, in Iraq, however AQI attacked the Shi'a population. In order to attempt to consolidate the Sunni insurgency under its banner, it also attacked groups that were in disagreement. This course of action led to a gradual trend of radicalization and open conflict with Sunnis and Shi'a alike. Faction AQI gradually fell away from Al Qaeda's leadership due to its acts of terrorism that targeted not just westerners and Coalition Forces in Iraq, but also fellow Muslims.

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